

KURO NO HIERA-GLAPHICOS

Colours the world, in this Fantasy Action

修魔黒鋼

くろの
ヒエラ
グラフィコス

嬉野秋彦

2

URESHINO
AKIHIKO

illustr. ミユキルリア

ヴァレリア・コスタクルタ
Valeria Costacurta

「……ごめんなさい、ヴァレリア。
質問していい?」
「いいけど……何?」



黒鋼の

くろのヒエラ・グラフィコス

魔紋修復士

KURO NO HIERA GLAPHICOS

「はひ!?」

「彼には許嫁とかいるのかしら?」

「確かりヒテルナツハ卿は
ヴァレリアと同じ年よ。
ねえ?」

カリン・ルドベック
Karin Rudbeck

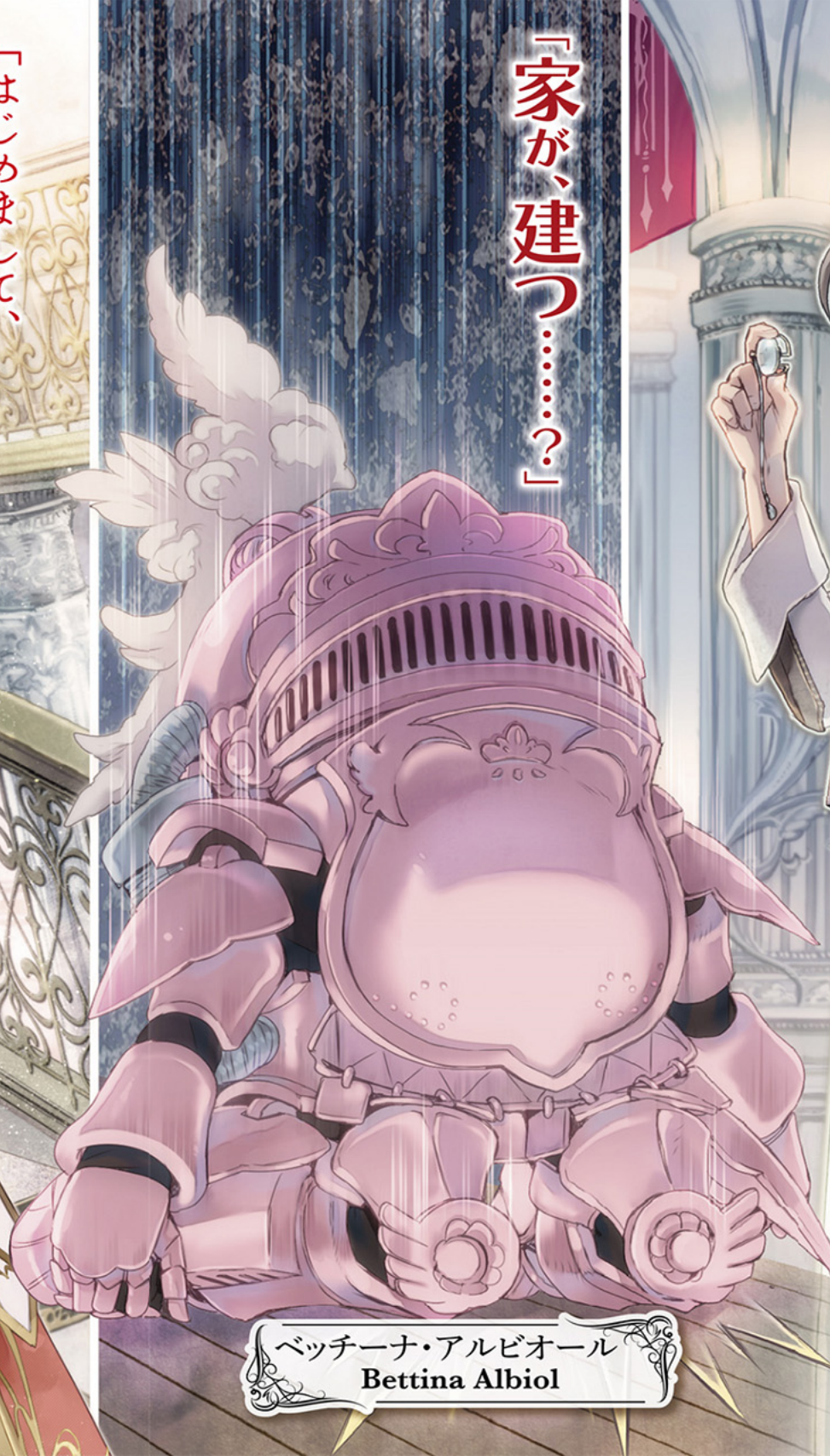
ペトラ・ルドベック
Petra Rudbeck





ダンテ・バリエンテ
Dante Valiente

「はじめまして、
コスタクルタ殿下。
ビラノバの次席宰相
ダンテ・バリエンテです」



ベッチーナ・アルビオール
Bettina Albiol

「家が、建つ……？」

キケ・アルビオール
Quique Albiol



「ああ、いや……
これは、まあ……
そもそもお偉がたの
前に出ることのない
窓際族なものですから、
どうふるまったらよいのか
判りませんので」

ルキウス・リヒテルナツハ
Lucius Richternach

ジェフレン・イサーク・フォルティア
Jeffren Isaac Fortia

「それはさすがに母上にも
お話しするわけにはいきませんよ」

ティアル・ケルキック
Thial Krkic

「……あのぼうやはまた何か
やらかすつもりなのかしら？」

オルヴィエト・リヒテルナツハ
Orvieto Richternach

「封印騎士団に入りたい人間は
いくらでもいるけど、
どうも彼らは、騎士団をただの
仲よしクラブか何かみたい
に思っている節があるからね。
以前は確かにそうだった
かもしれないけど、
少しずつ変えていかないと」

「……いきなり
斬りかかるのはやめて」

低い声でいいながら
舞い降りてきたのは、
黒いマント姿のカリンだった。
マントの下は、みぞおちから
へそまで丸出しになる
神巫の装束を着込んでいる。
シヨートパンツからすらりと
伸びる右の太腿には、
青白い魔紋の輝きが残っていた。

ディミタール・リヒテルナツハ
Dimitar Richternach

Prologue - Marriage Hunting Advice

There were numerous unmarried people in the Holy City Roma of Amaddo. And in this metropolis, where goods from various places of the continent were gathered and business transactions flourished, an abundance of money and labour poured in.

Hence, the state where the male population always exceed the female population continued in this district and inevitably, there were numerous bachelors. Associated with this reality was a cynical regard that the sex industry was expected to grow, but countless men in general wished for a peaceful married life and were searching for a spouse.

Although Dimitar should have started to consider such matter age-wise, he'd always tell his childhood friend Lucius that he had decided not to marry.



It was as though he had a strong **fear** or **hate** to the thing called family—.

Due to lead being inserted into the iron wick that coursed through its centre, the bokken became slightly heavier than Jagieruka. If he couldn't even remain fine after swinging this for dozens of minutes, then he was totally unsuitable for actual combat.

The colleagues from his Seal Chivalric Order's (*Furigana: Templar Aegis*) days didn't take such training very seriously. Hence for better or worse, it was the only time for Dimitar who was completely isolated from that group to train alone quietly.

If he was to be evaluated now, he'd have a childish rebellious spirit. However, the Dimitar from those days would swing his sword earnestly, sacrifice sleeping time to study magic and read to increase his knowledge, as he wholeheartedly didn't want to lose to the surrounding nobles who only had their high pride. Eventually, that endeavour wasn't useful in aiming for the top of the Chivalric Order, but instead became a great weapon in his life as a Hiera Glaphicos.

However, this weapon rusted very easily.

Therefore, Dimitar would polish it whenever he was free.

In the inn's back yard, he was continuing his practice that looked simple from a third person's view, and the landlord's daughter was grumbling imprudently at such a Dimitar.

「...How can you swing that thing day after day without getting bored of it?」

Stepping on a stool to air the washed clothes, Mercier looked at Dimitar and mixed in a sigh.

「You aren't a child. I don't understand why Dimi-shan who's old enough to know better would amuse yourself with swordplay」

「That's because it's a world unrelated to you. It's fine to not know anything」

Mercier was still seven years old, thus she didn't know what kind of work Dimitar did. Simply put, even if she saw him practising with the sword like this, she might never have thought that it was a necessary training for his work.

Therefore, Dimitar permitted the girl's cheeky speech and conduct. Besides, if he was untactful and angered her, it was likely that he'd have to air the remaining washed clothes by himself. At any rate, the washed clothes which the perspiring girl was airing included Dimitar's too.

「—About that, Dimi-san isn't wandering from place to place, so won't it be better for you to get your hands on some jobs?」

Unaware of Dimitar's open-mindedness, the blameworthy and smooth-tongued girl said things at her own convenience.

「If not, you won't be able to marry even if you want to. Why not take the son of the bakery across the street as your bride? He's eighteen」

「Is that so? ...However, if I were to get married, then I can't stay in this inn anymore. I'll have to rent and move into a house somewhere else」

「...In that case, that'll be troubling」

Mercier who had almost finished airing the clothes dried her hands on her apron and murmured.

「If Dimi-san isn't here, the income from the rent will decrease」

「Rather than decrease, there'll be none right?」

Mercier's house was both an inn and a bar, but for these several years, Dimitar was the only lodger. It was uncertain if something was wrong, thus it didn't accommodate tenants; if the bar where vulgar men gathered was kept at a distance, it might be unthinkable that someone lived here.

「Anyway, if that's case, it's better if I don't marry」

「That makes sense...come to think of it, Otou-san always say being single makes him feel at ease」

「The problem is solved then」

「Everything ends well, I guess」

Mercier readily changed her opinion and started walking to the main building while holding the empty pail in her arms. The

praiseworthy girl, who lost her mother early and had assisted her father since she was a child, seemed just a little weak-willed.

「.....」

After moving his body for another five minutes, Dimitar finally lowered the sword.

Dimitar had been free ever since returning from the mission in Seriba a few days ago. While restoring and recovering his magic crests (*Furigana: Hierateika*), unless Valeria was designated for the next mission, it was natural that the turn of Dimitar who was her exclusive Hiera Glaphicos wouldn't come along.

As a matter of fact, since Valeria's achievement of suppressing Seriba's insurrection together with the on-site garrisoned troops was highly evaluated, Dimitar's reputation also rose.

However, it was still insufficient. Unless he accomplished more merits and gained the surrounding people's recognition, he wouldn't be of use to Lucius in the truest meaning.

Therefore, at such times like this—though he concluded that he shouldn't let them go to waste—Dimitar was feeling impatient.

Leaning on the bokken that was thrust into the ground, Dimitar was arranging his breathing while wiping off his sweat when he suddenly felt an undivided gaze on him and turned around.

「Dimitar-san, Dimitar-saan!」

From the arched back gate's shadow, a short but wide figure with a mantle pulled over her head stretched out a pink hand creakily towards Dimitar and beckoned him over.

「...Are you always in this get-up?」

Dimitar approached Bettina with an amazed expression.

「I know that your appearance is conspicuous, hence you wear that mantle; but won't it be better to just somehow take Bachu off in the first place?」

「I, I was in a rush!」

「What's the matter?」

「O, Oji-sama! Oji-sama was!」

「...Chief Engineer (*Furigana: Maestro*)?」

「He, he was abruptly taken away by people from the castle!」

「—」

Brushing up his forelocks that were damp with sweat, Dimitar closed his eyes partly.

Chapter 01 - Woman of the Past?

In Amaddo that was a major power of magic, **magic warriors** constituted as the core of its army. At most, one in ten people could use magic and in reality, as far as the level of enduring combat was concerned, that ratio dropped even lower—maintaining an army which gathered and comprised of such talents could be described as a characteristic of a strong country like Amaddo.

However, if even an ordinary person became able to wield magic—. If Amaddo could monopolised that technique which made the aforementioned possible, its position would become increasingly firm. But if that technique was shared among various countries, then Amaddo's advantage would be greatly reduced.



A man named that double-edged sword “**magic engineering**”.

At a corner of the Roma castle and in a small hall where the Seal Chivalric Order's investiture ceremony was carried out, was a “knight's room”. Although the investiture ceremony hadn't occurred once in these several years, this place wasn't use for other official function.

Therefore, it was unprecedented that numerous people were gathered in this “knight's room”.

One of the protagonists was none other than the Crown Prince, Jeffren Isaac. Assembled on the prince's flanks were the Military Minister Garido-kyou and his aides. Furthermore, the Chivalric Order's Vice-Leader, Lucius Richternach, was also present.

However, tying down such royal court's authorities was this place's other protagonist, the “oddball”— Amaddo Army Third Arsenal's Chief

Engineer Quique Albiol, who by rights, shouldn't have been able to meet the Crown Prince easily.

The Crown Prince was arranging the roses in a vase on a table and Quique, who was standing before it in his usual slightly dirty white robe, polished his monocle and sighed.

「You!」

Finding fault with Quique's behaviour, Garido-kyou raised his eyebrows.

「—In the presence of His Highness, what kind of behaviour is this?!」

「Ah, iya...this's, maa...I'm originally a useless employee who's not used to appearing before Your Excellencies, so I'm not sure what behaviour will be good—」

To what extent was he serious? Quique bowed his head with a “pekori”.

Garido-kyou seemed to be about to say something more, but if he (*Isaac*) let the raucous minister speak here again, the talk wouldn't proceed regardless of how much time has passed. While his pruning resounded with a “chaki chaki”, Isaac reined in the minister and asked.

「Chief Engineer Albiol...is it?」

「That's correct, Your Highness」

「There's nothing to this, it isn't a meeting to catechize you」

「I see. I thought that it'll be an informal inquiry for sure」

Quique replied nonchalantly.

The Crown Prince mixed in a wry smile and whispered secretly to Lucius who was beside him.

「...I've the memory of seeing this (*Quique's behaviour*) somewhere, albeit difficult to recall」

「I feel that the attitude of Dimitar who taunts people is considerably influenced by this Chief Engineer-dono」

「Ah, Dimitar does take after him」

Isaac agreed with a self-satisfied look.

「Chief Engineer」

Lucius cleared his throat slightly and asked anew.

「—This has already been announced officially and I think you've heard about it, but a revolt occurred in Seriba a few day prior」

「Wasn't it suppressed by Costacurta?」

「Yes. With the current effort of Costacurta, the revolt didn't spread to other lands and was suppressed in its initial stage. ...Nonetheless, we actually saw something that bothered us very much at that time」

「Something bothersome...?」

「A magic that erases magic crests instantly—and a gauntlet that makes it possible」

「...」

Putting his monocle back on, Quique frowned at Lucius's words.

「The revolt in Seriba was caused by the incitement of a southern person called Hokon. That background is presently under investigation, but it's likely that someone provided that gauntlet to this man」

「The gauntlet that you mentioned, what kind of thing is it?」

「Unfortunately, the actual article couldn't be retrieved, but

according to His Highness's report, it's a gauntlet that was applied with subtle magic crests. If a person who originally couldn't use magic freely wears it, he'll be able to use magic, or so it seems」

「Chief Engineer」

Throwing out his old yet adequately thick chest, Garido-kyou spoke.

「...From what I heard, aren't you doing a similar research? Magic engineering (*Furigana: Tekunorogia marefika*) or something—」

「Just a minute, Garido-kyou」

Isaac pointed the tip of the shears towards the Military Minister.

「Why're you acting so high and mighty?」

「...Ha?」

「"From what I heard" you say, why're other people involved? If I remember correctly, aren't you the Military Minister? That being the case, you should normally have a good grasp of what's being manufactured by the army's workshop or what kind of research is going on, shouldn't you?」

「Err, that's, um—」

「Your Highness, it's natural that Minister-kakka has no knowledge of it」

Quique replied in place of Garido who had fallen silent from the prince's words.

「In the first place, there wasn't a decent budget allocated to my research. Though it's called research, maa, it's akin to my hobby, and since funding is a necessity, I paid for it with my own money, that's how it is, yes」

From Quique's manner of speaking, it was as if to say that a

detailed report wasn't obligated since he didn't receive the budget. Or perhaps, it might be a meagre sarcasm towards the top brass that didn't understand his research.

「Nonetheless, the fact that the army's workshop is managed on the Chief Engineer's individual finance is a problem in itself」

「Y, Your Highness, such a thing, if I may have a moment! Expressly concerning yourself with this is—」

「I presume Your Highness's question is whether I can create a similar thing to that gauntlet?」

「U, umu」

「Unless I see the actual article, it's unfortunate, but to be blunt... maa, it's almost impossible」

「Impossible? As expected, it's impossible」

「Rather, if such a thing exists, I'd certainly like to see it for future reference. It's pleasing to know that there are people who devote their enthusiasm into magic engineering besides me」

「Then...is it someone else who made it and gave it to Hokon, I wonder?」

「Your, Your Highness! It's overly hasty to assume so! We've yet to search this man's workshop!」

「Eh? Could it be that I'm under suspicion?」

Quique looked at Garido-kyou in amazement. It was fine for the minister who was somehow promoted from a military person to show fortitude and nerves of steel, but his way of thinking was severely lacking in flexibility. It'd be all right to let him command an army that was comprised of capable staff officers, but letting the person himself draft strategies might be a considerable gamble.

Isaac waved his hand lightly to hush Garido-kyou and spoke to Quique.

「Maa, the possibility isn't nil since the gauntlet's origin is completely undetermined. Even Hokon's subordinates totally don't know from where and how their ringleader obtained that gauntlet」

「It's unfortunate, but like I said before, it's beyond my capacity to make such a thing」

「I understand. But if that's the case...」

While Isaac was pouting his lips and ruminating, a page came along and notified him that there was someone requesting for an audience.

「An audience? With me? Who's it?」

「It's Valeria Costacurta」

「—」

Isaac raised his eyebrows and spontaneously looked at Lucius.



At Bettina's urging, Valeria arrived at the royal palace urgently and reflexively frowned upon seeing Dimitar who was standing at the decorated gate of the elegant garden. Although it was hard to say that Dimitar was affable, he had a visage which showed that he was in an exceptionally bad mood today. She had a premonition that prior to greetings, abusive words would fly towards her at the instance they met.

—Just when she thought so, they really did fly towards her.

「You're late. Don't take your own sweet time」

「Haa!?!」

Although she anticipated it, Valeria furrowed her brow at those unsparing words and approached Dimitar.

「You...that's not how you speak to a person after calling her out abruptly, right!? And I was even spending time leisurely at home! In the first place, for what reason did an exclusive Hiera Glaphicos like you call me for!？」

「Oi, don't open your big mouth and shout so much. The soldier is watching」

「—」

Indeed, in the garden where the greenery and brick-paved paths drew symmetric patterns, palace guards could be seen here and there. Valeria noticed one of them gave her a respectful bow while standing at attention.

Valeria hurriedly shut her mouth, took off the mantle that she wore to avoid the public's attention and straightened her dishevelled formal wear.

「...In any case, you should come personally if you've a business to take care of. Getting Bettina to call me, there's a limit to your laziness!」

「Oi, Gacha Pink. You haven't explain anything to her?」

「Y, yes. I only thought of meeting up with Valeria-sama immediately...」

「Eh? What?」

「Your assistance is needed, though strictly speaking, it's for this fellow and not me」

Hitting the top of Bettina's helmet, Dimitar removed the sword hanging on his waist.

「Whatever, I'll explain gradually. —Hold onto this and wait here while we enter the inner part of the royal palace」

「U, understood! Please take care of Oji-sama~」

「Ah」

Dimitar entrusted his sword to Bettina, who was trembling and stamping her foot repeatedly to resist the urge to pee, and promptly proceeded for the royal palace's interior.

「W, wait a moment! Richternach-kyou! What's going on? This Oji-sama is?」

「He's the army's Chief Engineer and also Gachi Pink's Oji-san, but it seems that he was marched off to the royal palace this morning. Gachi Pink said to get him back somehow and hoped for the awe-inspiring Your Eminence Costacurta to appear personally」

「This child's Oji-san? Why on earth? Is he guilty of something?」

「He's certainly eccentric, but he's not a person who'd do wicked deeds」

Entering the royal palace, a cool shadow fell onto the vicinity and the pair's footsteps resounded loudly. Even here, a considerable number of palace guards were protecting various places, but excluding Dimitar, no one tried to stop Valeria's advance. The status as a Dominas was special to that extent.

Dimitar continued speaking in an even lowered voice.

「...Did you write about Hokon's gauntlet in the report of the Seriba's case?」

「Eh? Of course. What about it?」

「You, did you perhaps use my Jagieruka as an example to explain that guy's gauntlet? Going by that flow, it's no wonder that he is

personally questioned by the Crown Prince」

「Eh...? What kind of flow?」

「Think about it, since a person who can make useful tools of such irregularity happen to be near his esteemed self, the prince will try to ask about his story first. It might actually be his way of questioning, I think」

「Way of questioning...is it?」

「Considering how soldiers raided the workshop and forcibly marched Ossan off, the prince probably held the suspicions that he's a spy of a force that is hostile to Amaddo or a collaborator」

「Then, we're to dispel that doubt?」

「Yeah. If he thinks calmly, it'll be instantly clear that Ossan and the Seriba's case are unrelated since His Highness is an intelligent person contrary to the town's impression. I doubt he'd think of Ossan as the criminal, but there are people who suspect Ossan. To get those fellows to understand and release Ossan, we've no choice but to elucidate on this and that. ...Or shall we return to Bettina and tell her that we can't advocate for her uncle?」

「U...」

As usual, he was a young man who said disagreeable things. She could ignore or rebut it if it was merely a verbal abuse, but the wicked part of Dimitar was that he was skilful in making an appeal to people's feelings of guilt like this. Dimitar said such things on the expectation that Valeria wouldn't take on an indifferent attitude towards Bettina whom she was acquainted with.

Dimitar indifferently raised the corners of his mouth and looked at the page who came trotting from their front.

「Don't make such a sulky face. The other party is His Highness the Crown Prince, you know? Besides, Lucius is probably there too」

「Lucius-sama is!?!」

「...How self-interested」

Ridiculing Valeria's quick change of attitude, Dimitar inspected his countenance and conveyed the purpose of Valeria's application for an audience with the Crown Prince.

「P, please wait just a minute!」

The title of Dominas held approximately the same importance as a minister in this Amaddo's royal court. Hence the page going back in a complete hurry which surpassed a trot might be a consequence of the fear from keeping Valeria waiting.

And it seemed that title even displayed its effect on the dignitaries who were assembled in the small hall. Without waiting for three minutes, the page from some time ago appeared soon again and guided the pair to the "knight's room".

「...If you're unsure of what to say, leave it to me without overdoing it」

Dimitar whispered softly so that it slipped into the sound of the door opening solemnly.

「—Since Bettina will cry if you make any careless remarks and worsen Ossan's position. It seems like something you'd do though」

「Gunuu...!」

At Dimitar's words that took people for fools, Valeria grasped the hem of her tabard tightly and suppressed her anger.



After giving a profound bow and raising his head, Dimitar somehow managed to read the flow of the place by observing the faces of those present singly.

Military Minister Garido-kyou who had an unpleasant expression still held onto the conservative that cavalry and infantry were the focus of the battlefield, and didn't think too well of the magic warriors (*Furigana: Marefikos*) who possessed great power within the army. To say nothing of, Garido definitely wouldn't try to show understanding towards Quique's research which might enable ordinary people to use magic.

Presumably, the Crown Prince and Lucius were pacifying Garido-kyou who didn't have a very favourable impression of Quique, thus holding a suspicion that he was a spy—something like this perhaps? And the grin of Quique, who was the heart of the matter when he saw Dimitar appeared, made him feel somewhat irritated.

For whose sake did he went out of the way just to come here, thought Dimitar. He quelled the urge to curse and looked down at Valeria with a sidelong glance.

「Err, um...」

Valeria finished her manual-like greetings and shifted her gaze around nervously. That being said, this lady wasn't the type who'd become nervous in front of nobles; it was likely that she became tense easily just by being before Lucius.

After seeing Dimitar mixed in a sigh, as if guessing his feelings, Lucius broached the subject.

「Costacurta-geika, the urgent matter with His Highness...what could it be?」

「T, that...a, about the gauntlet that was in the enemy ringleader's possession from the recent Seriba's rebellion case...」

「Is there something that you should report to His Highness?」

「T, there is! Well, if I had to say, there is, but how should I put it—」

「Which is it, Costacurta-geika?」

The taciturn Garido-kyou promptly urged the hesitant Valeria on.

However, the present Valeria didn't have a plan to break down this impasse. She was sure there was none. If there was, would she not have kept on talking one-sidedly to the obstinate old man?

That was evident from Valeria looking at Dimitar occasionally since some time ago. It was obvious that her gaze was shouting 「Can't you say something!」

「Your Highness」

Bowing reverently with his hand placed on his chest, Dimitar immediately began spouting a pack of lies.

「—Costacurta-geika and I have faced that Hokon guy before. That's to say, the ones who know the gauntlet which was used by that man the best are currently Her Eminence and I」

「I suppose so」

「Based on that, I currently don't think that Chief Engineer Albiol is the person who could have made that gauntlet」

「I'd like to hear your reason for that, Your Eminence」

The person who interfered at once wasn't the Crown Prince, but Garido-kyou.

「T, that—Richternach-kyou, explain to His Highness and Minister-kakka」

Valeria probably didn't know what Dimitar wanted to say, thus she diverted the topic to him.

「If I've to say it as it is...simply put, Chief Engineer Albiol has no talent for magic. Without the talent for magic, he can't draw magic crests」

「...So, what's it that you want to say?」

「In short, for Chief Engineer to somehow make a tool, the cooperation of a magic warrior who can design magic crests is indispensable」

「Like I said! What're you—」

「Garido-kyou」

The Crown Prince reined in the military minster who had raised his voice spontaneously.

「What Richternach-kyou meant to say is this. —For Hokon's gauntlet to be completed, a person who can use the magic of erasing magic crests instantly is necessary」

「That's correct. ...However, does a magic warrior who can use such convenient magic exists in reality?」

「As far as I know, there isn't. There's no information of such magic being used in other cases either」

Lucius replied immediately. His words were well-founded since his mother was the director of the Royal Magic Academy (*Furigana: Prasa marefikos*).

「Then it's unjustified as expected. If the magic crest that served as its (*gauntlet's*) basis doesn't exist, it's impossible for Chief Engineer to create such thing however much he wanted to」

「Nu...」

Garido-kyou couldn't come up with any refuting words and furrowed his brow deeper.

Hearing the words of Dimitar who was in front of the vase of roses, the Crown Prince removed his gloves and said to Quique.

「—That being the case, Chief Engineer Albiol. My apologies for suspecting you」

「Not at all, if your point of view is taken into account, then it's a justified judgement. Besides, I can't say anything concerning magic crests since the actual thing isn't here, but it's apparent that gauntlet was created by means of magic engineering」

「Chief Engineer」

The Crown Prince then leaned forward and asked.

「I'd like your candid opinion but, do you not know of another person besides you who can make such thing?」

「It's likely that whichever country it may be, this sort of research is in progress, albeit different in degree, is what I think. —However, I've no connection whatsoever with the fellow researchers of that side, so I've no clue who you mean」

「Do you mean to say you've no knowledge of who it may be?」

「Well, there's just one person but」

「Who's it?」

「In truth, there's a person named Nereida who continued to research with me in my workshop, but she left Amaddo in pursue for better research environment five years ago」 (TN: The noun used to refer to Nereida didn't specify the gender, but I denoted her as a she after reading ahead.)

「Saying that she left Amaddo, in short, she was headhunted?」

「I believe that's likely to be the case. ...At any rate, it's due to an unsatisfactory amount of budget being allocated to my workshop」

Quique looked at Garido-kyou repeatedly from across his monocle. Finding the sight of the Military Minister's face turning bright red yet unable to say anything to be comical, Dimitar faced down and laughed.

The Crown Prince let out a sigh and looked at Garido-kyou.

「Since our country originally has numerous magic warriors, I can understand why the expansion of artificial magic war potential is apathetic but...still, isn't it unpleasant if such intellect goes to other countries? If that's the case, it's necessary to distribute the budget even more precisely」

「Then, Chief Engineer」

Replacing the Crown Prince, Lucius asked.

「Where's that Nereida person now?」

「She had only send me a letter once」

「When?」

「Last autumn. It was a letter of invitation to research together again, but naturally, I declined. —I don't know her exact location, but she seemed to be in Biranoba at that time」

「Biranoba, huh...」

「Hey, just a minute」

While watching the Crown Prince, Lucius and even Garido-kyou discussing something, Valeria whispered softly into Dimitar's ear.

「When he said Biranoba, he meant that Biranoba? Our neighbour?」

「I guess so」

Biranoba was a signatory of the “Holy Alliance (*Furigana: Riga Santourear*)” and a neighbour that had prosperous exchange with Amaddo. Based on that alone, it was hard to think that Biranoba would lure an Amaddo army researcher away, yet the thought of them being capable of anything existed too.

「—Ah, Valeria-jou? And Richternach-kyou too」

Having finished the discussion, the Crown Prince addressed the pair with an extremely relaxed tone.

「I wonder if the both of you can go on a trip for me?」

「Ha...?」

「I asked if it's possible for you to travel to Biranoba」

「Us?」

「Strictly speaking, it won't be just the two of you. —In any case, only you two had seen that gauntlet; isn't there the phrase “your ship had already embarked (*point of no return*)”? There are also various coordination that is essential, but for now, can you begin preparation for departure?」

「T, that's—」

「You can't? Even though I tentatively have the discretionary power since Father is currently absent and it's an official command from a Senior Inspector (*Furigana: Sensor mayor*)?」

「Err, well, it's not that I can't—」

「Then it's settled. Thank you. And Chief Engineer Albiol too」

Summarising his talk with a gentle clap of hands, the Crown Prince once again spoke to Dimitar and Valeria after ordering Quique to leave the room.

「Valeria-jou, if I recall, Karin Rudbeck who's of similar age as you has relatives in Biranoba, right?」

「Yes...I heard that her maternal grandmother was born there」

「Then it's decided. ...You've no complaints right, Garido-kyou?」

「...Since His Majesty has yet to return, I'll abide by Your Highness's sanction」

Although he said that, displeasure was plainly written on the minister's face. It wasn't clear why, but it was likely that the development wasn't amusing to Garido-kyou.

「Valeria-jou and Karin-jou are to head towards Biranoba as soon as preparations are completed」

「As goodwill ambassadors to Biranoba...is it?」

It wasn't a rare case for Dominas who were wives of Redountra to visit another country as country-representing envoys. Hence, it was natural that Valeria had such thought upon hearing the Crown Prince's proposal.

「Iya, not as the country's representatives; I want you to go under the guise of Rudbeck-jou visiting her relatives till the end. If we do that, then even if some problems arise, it'll be hard for it to develop into a serious trouble between countries」

It was a rational decision, yet it seemed really like His Highness to omit the official stance and say his true intention directly. Sure enough, Valeria who had heard that didn't know how to reply and could only show a complicated smile.

「If that Nereida person really did make that aforementioned gauntlet, then there's a likelihood that Biranoba was involved in the Seriba's rebellion. Secretly investigating such a thing will be an important mission. Will you do it?」

「U, understood. I'll put in my utmost effort」

Valeria breathed deeply and agreed. In any case, for this girl who desperately wanted to stack up achievements, it was impossible for her to reject such important mission after hearing it.

Of course, for Dimitar too, no matter how many such chances

presented themselves, he wouldn't feel troubled. Raising the corners of his lips secretly, Dimitar left the Crown Prince's presence together with Valeria.



「—Yo」

When the pair returned to the garden in front of the royal palace, Quique Albiol was waiting for them with Bettina clinging onto his waist.

「What a misfortune huh, Ossan」

「Iya, absolutely. Furthermore, for troubling even Her Eminence Costacurta, I'm really sorry」

Quique grasped the head of Bettina who was still sniffing and gave a bow. That was his own way of paying respect to Valeria, but having said that, he didn't pay too much attention to formalities. Having become accustomed to Dimitar's insolence and Bettina's over-familiarity, Valeria didn't take offence to Quique's attitude.

While holding onto the hem of her dress beneath the tabard lightly, Valeria gave a bow and then asked Quique.

「I shall ask you bluntly since you're here, but Chief Engineer didn't really make that gauntlet, did you?」

「I presume that thing gave you considerable troubles?」

Quique took out a khsier from the breast pocket of his wrinkled-up white robe and gave it a light shake. At that moment, a red light lit up with a "poun" in its bowl. It was probably an item that Quique created by means of magic engineering.

Inhaling the smoke once with a "fuka", Quique nodded.

「—Ma, it's theoretically feasible, but it's impossible in reality. This

was said just now but, it might be somehow possible if a magic warrior who can use the magic to instantly erase magic crests exists and his cooperation is obtained」

Magic that erased magic crests existed. It was used primarily to deprive magic warriors who had committed crimes of their magic; nonetheless, it couldn't erase magic crests instantly. At best, its speed was almost the same as drawing magic crests, and if it was to the degree of erasing bit-by-bit, then he had heard about it.

「...On the contrary, I want to ask if that gauntlet actually exists?」

「It does」

Dimitar replied earlier than Valeria.

「This person (*Valeria*) included, but I've clearly seen it. —Rather, even you can verify that the magic crests engraved onto Jagieruka's blade have disappeared completely, right? It suffered damages from that gauntlet, you know?」

「In the case of metal, there's the possibility of them (*magic crests*) being abraded due to heat. I won't believe it unless I see the actual thing」

「That reminds me...I wonder why was it not found?」

Hokon had spent his final moment inside the blazing mansion. Therefore, the gauntlet in question should have been recovered by searching every nook and cranny of the fire-devastated ruins.

「Didn't it become a problem because it wasn't found?」

「Eh?」

「Hokon's burnt corpse was discovered」

Censuring Quique's remarks, Dimitar continued.

「...But the gauntlet wasn't on Hokon's hand. His corpse had

retained its original form despite how strong the flames might have been, so it's inconceivable for the gauntlet which is made of metal to melt without leaving any trace. —That being the case, I can only think of someone taking it away」

「Bearing that in mind, His Highness seems to think that Hokon had a collaborator. Different from Bigerou, it's surely someone who can manipulate dangerous magic」

「Ossan」

Dimitar asked with a pensive look on his face.

「What kind of person is that Nereida? She shouldn't have been around when I started going in and out of your place, right?」

「Come to think of it, I also don't know that person」

Bettina agreed with Dimitar's words. If it was five years ago, then she was still an eight-year-old child. For a child lacking discernment to come and go, Quique's workshop was too much of a danger.

「If she's still alive, she should be around thirty now. I also don't know her detailed background very well」

「I'm amazed you did an important research with such a person」

「That's because it was a research that wasn't given a budget. There was no reason to decline her assistance. Above all, she's capable. — However, if I think about it now, perhaps that woman's intention from the start was to steal my research」

「That person...is a woman?」

「Nereida is her given name, Your Eminence. She's a considerably beautiful woman with long black hair. I can only describe her outward appearance characteristic to that extent though...」

「If it's in Biranoba, black hair might not be common. For now, we

can only search with that as a clue」

「Isn't that similar to catching clouds? —」

Feeling fatigued ever since coming out, Valeria sighed.

However, if she considered this as a chance to do a meritorious deed, it was a beneficial talk. Besides, it was plausible that there were various perquisites.

「—Then Richternach-kyou, carry out the preparations without any mistake」

Ordering Dimitar so, Valeria began her way back home.

Different from her previous mission, this mission—though definitely an absolute secret—didn't require her to conceal her social status or do nothing but hasten; to be a Dominas till the end, but hiding her true objective and heading towards Biranoba.

「In short, it's an official elegant trip, right?」

Valeria mixed in a mutter while humming.

She was sure that there'd be three meals per day and a nap upon arriving at Biranoba, and a party would be held at night to warmly welcome them. Needless to say, she shouldn't forget that this was the Crown Prince's imperial command, but if it was within the scope of forgiveness, wouldn't it be fine to enjoy herself, or so Valeria thought.

Hence, Valeria summoned Nei and Maru who were her childhood friends as well as housemaids when she returned to the mansion and began selecting a dress.

「Are you going to Biranoba?」

「Yes. ...Ma, Karin seems to be tagging along as an extra though」

Opening the closet, Valeria skimmed through the variety of dresses

from one end to another.

During missions or ceremonies, she was obligated to wear the tabard and dress bestowed by the king; hence she wanted to wear something she liked on such times.

「—Mu?」

Recently, Valeria had finally removed the bandage on her forehead, and her father Borha peered wonderingly into the room.

「What's the matter, Valeria? It's unusual for you to put on and off one dress after another」

「It doesn't matter, right? It's unrelated to Chichi-ue after all」

Holding the dress against her chest, she spun around repeatedly before the full-length mirror and replied rudely.

Although the other party was her blood relative, she couldn't talk about the top secret mission's details carelessly. And even if she didn't, as a result of her thoughtlessly saying that she was going on a top secret mission previously, her father had intruded into Lucius's place and caused an inconvenience.

Therefore, Valeria was absolutely resolved not to speak of the mission this time.

「Well? Is a dance scheduled to be held in someone's mansion? I've heard talks of extravagant events being kept in check temporarily due to the recent Seriba's case though」

「Though His Majesty mustn't return from his lover's place, there's no need for self-restraint, right? If His Majesty returns in the near future, a very lavish victory celebration will be held in the royal palace, so shouldn't I devote myself into making a new dress?」

That celebration's protagonist was obviously Valeria and she had already ordered a dress.

Nonetheless, no matter how she thought about it, she knew that it wouldn't be fun to be swamped with the guests' greetings on the appointed day. Hence, for this mission where she was the carefree invitee, Valeria intended to find room for enjoyment at any cost.

「Then why're you choosing dresses?」

「...You're fussing over every detail」

Valeria gave an exasperating sigh and turned around to face her father.

「I'm just accompanying Karin since she's visiting her relatives' place in Biranoba. That's enough, so don't meddle」

「What!? You're going to Biranoba!? How come I didn't hear of such a thing!」

「Isn't that obvious? This's the first time I mentioned it. By the way, I'll still go even if you say not to, okay? Since I'm ultimately the head of this family, there's no reason for me to be instructed by Chichi-ue on every detail」

「I know that. ...But Biranoba? ...And if I'm not wrong, Karin is the Rudbeck House's daughter?」

「What about it?」

「That means her relatives must be a fairly distinguished family. — Alright, go for it, my daughter!」

「Like I said, I'll still go without you telling me—」

「Though it's a small country, Biranoba has a long-standing history. If it's with that distinguished family, you might attain quite a social status. And you seem to be getting ready to attend a party by the looks of it. Now, go forth and capture a son of that good family, be it the second or third son!」

「Haa!?!」

Borha abruptly told Valeria to set off and began pushing her back, but it was expected if she thought about it. In short, he probably meant for her to go and search for a husband. Astonishment and anger welled up simultaneously, causing Valeria to throw the dress in her hands towards Nei.

「—There's no reason for me to search for a husband, right!? I wish you'd stop bringing up that topic in each and every thing!」

「I'm not saying that you've to get a husband immediately. But for the nine years later, while you still can—」

「Be it now or nine years later, I don't want to hear such talks from you! I don't live for the sake of giving birth to a heir!」

「N, no, I don't—」

「It's because you're my guardian that I allowed you to stay in this mansion, but I can still carry on living even if I'm alone. If you're to complain any more than this, can you please go home, Chichi-ue? For the dowry, I can give it to you now with all the interest included!」

The Costacurta House was in great decline during Valeria's grandfather's generation, but it recovered thanks to the vast amount of dowry that Borha had prepared when he was adopted into the family. As one would expect, a person who'd say such things to Valeria didn't exist anymore, but her grandfather at that time was backbitten for selling his daughter to a merchant for money.

It was an old story, in which such grandfather and mother were already deceased, but Valeria still loathed her grandfather who had treated her mother as a transaction's material, and she couldn't bring herself to like her father who had bought his way into this family.

Due to that, Valeria couldn't stop herself from opposing her father who'd badger her to get a husband immediately.

Looking at the back of her father leaving the room despondently across the mirror, Valeria expelled her anger quietly.

「Ojou-sama—」

Nei who was helping Valeria to choose a dress spoke with an indescribable expression.

「Danna-sama doesn't think of Ojou-sama as a tool for giving birth to a heir—」

「Ne—i! Enough of that talk already!」

「...Hai」

For unintentionally chastising even Nei, Valeria silently fell into self-loathing.



Eventually, it was arranged for Dimitar and party to depart for Biranoba one week later. Karin Rudbeck probably had to send a letter to her relatives during that period to schedule for a visit. Although they weren't visiting as the country's representatives, the other side still need to prepare adequately to welcome the pair of Dominas.

In any case, the coordinating role wasn't Dimitar's job under those circumstances. His duty was to act as the party's escort until the end. It'd be better if his turn didn't come, but depending on the situation, there might be a time when he had to act as a spy. Perhaps on that occasion, Dimitar would have to dirty his hands.

「...—For the time being, I want to ask you this but」

Giving a sidelong glance towards Bettina who was running around inside the workshop with a “gashon gashon” and consolidating the luggage, Dimitar asked Quique.

「If by chance, that woman named Nereida was really involved in

the Seriba's rebellion, she'll be a wanted person of Amaddo」

「I'm sure she'll be」

Quique replied disinterestedly while cleaning the bowl of his khiser with a piece of twisted paper.

「—There's a possibility that I'll have to kill that woman; even so, you're fine with that?」

「Is this about seeking my permission?」

「If you've an irreplaceable relationship with that woman, I'm thinking of apologising」

「Oi oi, don't speak of such things in front of a child」

Quique stuffed leaves of shredded tobacco into the bowl again, lit a fire and then knitted his eyebrows.

「Is she not your daughter, I wonder?」

「I took custody of her and raised her up, so she's like a daughter to me」

「Is that so? You've strange tastes」

「Kora」 (TN: コラ; use to reprove or scold someone.)

「Setting aside the topic of Gacha Pink」

Dimitar stood up from the chair by the window.

「—Since you don't mind, then I won't hold back against her. It's easier that way. Is there something else?」

「By something else, you mean?」

「...For example, she's in fact a master of great swordsmanship or an expert in magic?」

「I've never seen her use sword or magic before. ...But she's fairly knowledgeable, so she might have concealed the fact that she can use magic」

「Saying that you feel that she concealed it, are you feeling that woman is suspicious to some extent?」

Quique didn't answer Dimitar's question. As though he had never heard that question, he gazed out of the window and puffed out smoke.

Honestly, even Dimitar couldn't grasp this oddball's real intention. From the start, he was a man who turned his back on promotion and fame, only immersing himself in the researches that he wanted to do. Being detached from the world, the authenticity of the things he spoke of couldn't be measured.

Dimitar held Jagieruka's hilt in his left hand and released a sigh.

「—Gacha Pink, it's time to go」

「Haai!」

With the luggage fastened onto the back of her small and stout body, Bettina bowed to her uncle with a “pekori”.

「—Well then Oji-sama, this Bettina will now head out to dispel Oji-sama's regrets」

「Oi, stop that way of speaking. It's like I've died of an unnatural death」

For a moment, Quique smiled wryly at his niece who had mistaken the usage of those words and tapped his khiser on the ashtray's edge.

「...Maa, I think Dii knows it perfectly, but still the both of you, be careful not to leak confidential information, okay?」

「Roger desu~」

「Yeah, I'll keep a close watch」

Sent off by Quique, Dimitar and Bettina left the workshop behind them.

「Dimitar-san, Dimitar-saan」

「...What?」

「I'm convinced that I know what kind of person Valeria-sama is already, but what kind of person is that Karin-sama who will be travelling with us this time desu?」

「Don't ask me. I haven't meet her yet」

「Is that so desu? But she's surely a pretty person since she's chosen as a Dominas, right?」

「I guess so. She seems quite competent, probably the calm and cool prodigy type. ...That Her Eminence (*Valeria*) is above that person (*Karin*), I can't believe it for a moment」

「If she's above Karin-sama who's a prodigy, then Valeria-sama is a genius desune!」

「Rather than a genius...that person is a natural airhead. She's the type who doesn't give a damn about magic theories and cut her way through everything with instinct or intuition」

Slightly wrinkling his brow, Dimitar shut his mouth upon seeing a carriage parked inside the Royal Magic Academy's backyard. There were already three girls and Lucius standing beside the carriage.

「Ah!」

Noticing Dimitar's party, Valeria flourished her hat that was adorned with feathers and raised her voice. Since this time was publicly a personal trip, Valeria wasn't in her Dominas ceremonial clothes of a dress beneath a tabard, but a gorgeous orange dress

typical of a noble's daughter.

「You're late—it's rude to keep us waiting!」

「Ma ma, Valeria-jou, since this is a long-awaited trip...」

When Lucius soothed her so, Valeria turned towards him with a flower-like smile and nodded.

「If Lucius-sama says so...hai!」

「Dii, you should have come slightly earlier」

「I've arrived on time」

Confirming the time on the clock tower, Dimitar said so.

「—If you've any complaints, it'd have been fine if you specified the time five minutes earlier from the start」

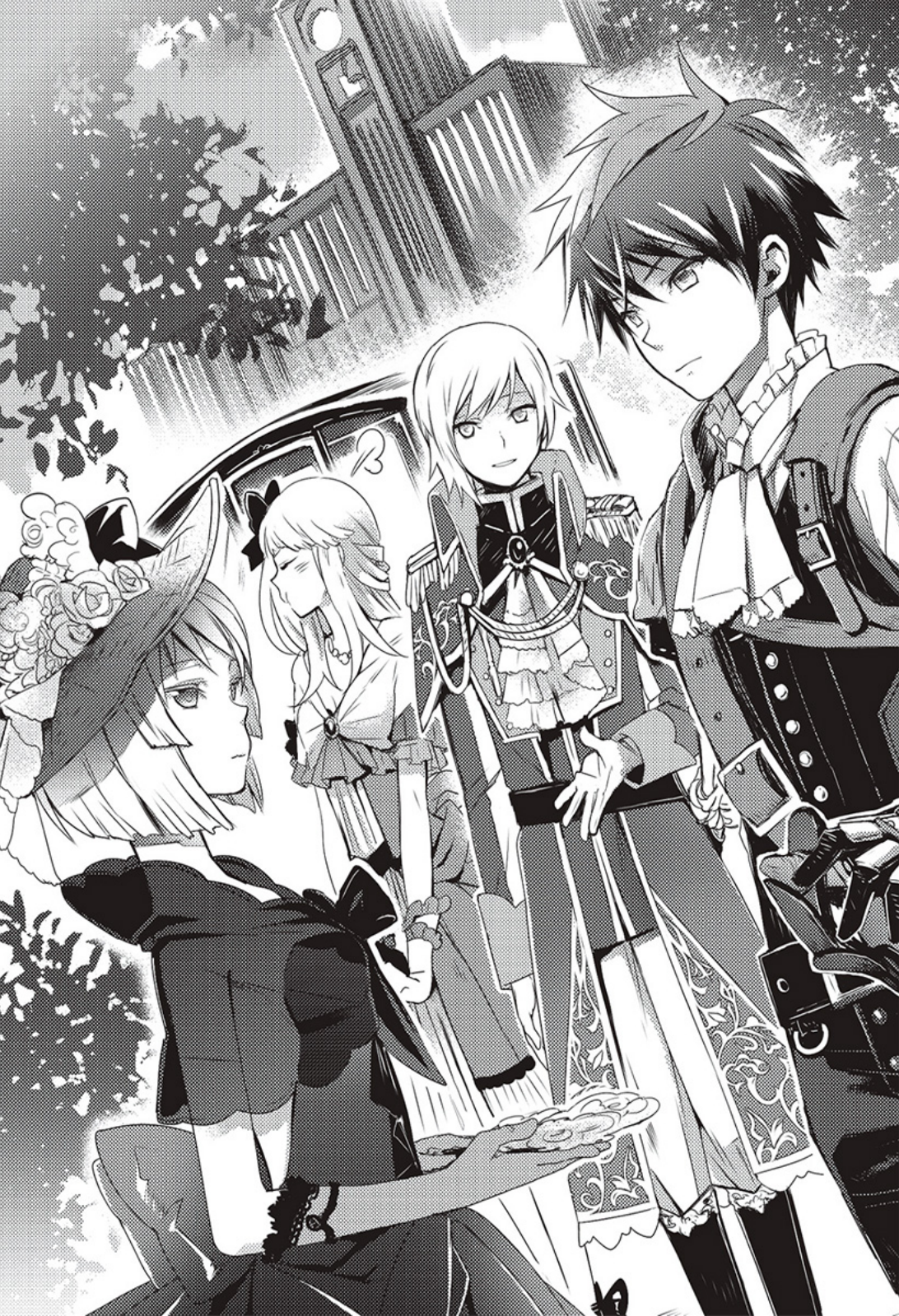
「Look here—」

When Valeria opened her mouth angrily, the bell signalling noon began to chime. Thereupon losing her timing, Valeria instead inhaled a large breath and snorted with a “funn!” and faced away.

Lucius shrugged his shoulders lightly and introduced the remaining pair of girls to Dimitar.

「—Dii, these are Karin Rudbeck-geika and her exclusive Hiera Glaphicos, Petra Rudbeck-jou」

「Your fame is widely known」



Since Karin and Valeria were on intimate terms, it was likely that Karin had already heard about Dimitar's personality. It was futile to take on a courteous behaviour now, but since Lucius was nearby, perhaps it might be better to give a neat greeting in the beginning at least.

「I'm Dimitar Richternach, Your Eminence」

Dimitar placed his right hand on his chest, bend his back slightly and bowed.

「.....」

The beauty with bluish grey hair—Karin Rudbeck sincerely looked at Dimitar who was much taller than her.

This girl was probably much more prudent and cautious than Valeria. Trying to see through her opponent's feelings without revealing her emotions—as though appraising him, was what Dimitar thought as he took on such an indifferent gaze.

「...Pleased to meet you, Richternach-kyou」

After plenty of time had passed, Karin greeted Dimitar.

「Though we may give you trouble one way or another, I look forward to working with you, Richternach-kyou」

Pushing up her glasses, Petra Rudbeck smiled sweetly. Although Karin and Petra were cousins of similar age, it felt rather unnatural to Dimitar that Petra was lavishing smiles as if she was the uncivil younger cousin.

Although this and that weren't things that he could publicise, Dimitar lightly struck the head of Bettina who was loading the brought luggage onto the carriage's rear,

「...She's the army's Chief Engineer Albiol's niece and Costacurta-geika's attendant, Bettina Albiol. She'll be accompanying us on this

trip as an escort together with me」

「Be, Bettina desu! Pleased to meet you~」

「...Best regards」

Replying indifferently, Karin turned towards Lucius.

「...Then Vice-Leader, we'll depart now」

「Yes, please take care」

Borrowing Lucius's hand, Valeria and party boarded the carriage.

「—Dii—」

Lucius whispered softly to Dimitar who was confirming that their luggage was fastened securely.

「I think this goes without saying, but the pair (*Karin and Valeria*)'s safety—」

「I know. Other than that, isn't it natural to bring a bit more attendants along?」

It was a luxury for four people to get on a two-horse carriage, but if the Dominas pair that Amaddo was proud of was to set off for a foreign trip, they ought to bring alongside an additional dozens of attendants or escorts.

Even if it was publicly a personal trip, to be able to count the numbers of attendants with one hand, it was indeed too few.

「There's that but...the other side said it wasn't necessary」

「The other side?」

「Rudbeck-geika's grandmother's home—Valiente House wishes for them to come by themselves as they'll prepare everything necessary」

「...Is that a usual correspondence?」

「I think it's tactful way of expressing something but...maa, recklessly taking attendants along will become a responsibility there, and in the worst case, your burdens may increase」

Lucius murmured with a lowered voice. Although it wasn't clear what Valeria and Karin were thinking, but at least Lucius seemed to have taken into consideration the possibility of it becoming *that sort of thing*.

「—Anyway, take care and go」

「Yeah」

The girls had boarded the carriage but without a coachman, the carriage wouldn't move. Hence, Dimitar sat on the coachman's pedestal and picked up the bridles.

「Um~, what's the best thing for me to do...?」

「It'll be cramped if you get inside and the three preceding passengers might cry. ...You'll be next to me. Put on your mantle so you won't be conspicuous」

「Roger desu~」

Dimitar waited for Bettina, who was climbing onto the coachman's pedestal with a “noso noso”, and then struck the bridles with a snap.

Chapter 02 - Those Without Dominas

When the “**Holy Alliance**” was formed, each of the twelve allied countries had a **Dominas**.

However, the countries participating in that alliance had now decreased to seven. It was the consequence of fellow allies repeating the cycle of occasional disputes, mergers, separations and annexation, downfall and sudden rise to power.

Currently, the legitimate alliance signatories numbered seven, including Amaddo. In regard to that, eight quasi-signatories matched their paces with Amaddo to protect the “**Hill of Seal**”.

In general, the former was a large country while the latter were small countries, but above all, the obvious conclusive difference was whether they had **Dominas**.



Biranoba was one of the twelve countries when the “**Holy Alliance**” was formed. It had a history that long but lost its **Dominas** during those two hundred years and had to be contented with its quasi-signatory position now.

Valeria pulled back the drawn curtain of the carriage’s window once it had left the Roma’s castle gates fairly behind.

「...If there’s any inconvenience from becoming a Dominas, then it’s that we can’t appear freely in front of people」

If someone was to peek into the carriage by chance and expose the fact that Valeria and Karin were aboard, the castle town might have

become quite a bit of racket. Hence the velvet curtain was drawn across the window to avoid unnecessary trouble.

After opening the window slightly, the regular sounds of the horses' hooves and wheels streamed in with the gentle wind that carried the grass's fragrance unique to the countryside.

Closing the book that she was reading, Karin abruptly asked Valeria, who was resting her elbow on the window frame and taking deep breaths, a question.

「...Excuse me, Valeria. Is it all right if I ask you a question?」

「It's fine but...what's it?」

「How old is he?」

「Eh?」

「Him. How old is he?」

「By him...you mean Richternach-kyou?」

Karin nodded quietly.

「Ah—, I'm certain that Richternach-kyou is the same age as Valeria, right?」

Opposite from Karin, the smiling Petra answered. Petra was Karin's exclusive Hiera Glaphicos, but she had originally aimed to be a Dominas, and this relation was known to Valeria.

「Then, he's one year younger than me」

While caressing her lower lip with her index finger, Karin murmured monotonously.

「...His parents aren't around anymore, right?」

「Eh? Yes, during his childhood, in a fire...」

Accurately speaking, it wasn't because of a mere fire that Dimitar's parents had passed away. It was a more tragic reason, but Valeria was hesitant to tell Karin the truth with her mouth, thus she simply agreed ambiguously.

「Then, his guardian is the academy's principal?」

「You're right but...what about it?」

「Is he your fiancé, I wonder?」

「Hahi!?」

Valeria gave a cowardly response to Karin's too abrupt question.

「W...what do you mean?」

「Exactly what it means. Whether it's decided that he'll be your marriage partner」

「I, I know that much! I totally know it! What I want to hear is, what kind of intention do you've for being curious about such personal information...」

「If he's free—I'm thinking of including him as a candidate. ...It's certainly personal information, though it'd be great if father can officially sound the academy's principal out when it comes down to the last moment」

「Do, do you perhaps...fancy that person?」

「I'm sorry. Conversely, I'd like to hear from you, but do you not like him?」

「O, obviously!」

Unintentionally shouting with a loud voice, Valeria hurriedly covered her mouth. There were just the three of them inside the carriage and Valeria didn't think that Dimitar and Bettina who were on the coachman's pedestal had heard their conversation; but more

than that, she was ashamed that she had lost her composure.

「...I mean, that man has a bad mouth and a big attitude. Though this's my duty, it's really nothing but vexing to be deployed together you know!？」

「Ah—, a straightforward person? Or the like?」

「He's not such a cool person!」

After Petra's example was rejected immediately by Valeria, Karin looked on indifferently.

「Maa, I've heard your opinion」

「You're seriously considering that guy as your groom candidate?」

「He isn't bad as a choice. In fact, he might be excellent」

「...Is that so?」

Valeria couldn't understand Karin's thoughts a bit. She got the chills just from imagining a marriage with Dimitar. Even though she gave in unwillingly into her imaginations and thought of him as the partner who played the pseudo husband, it might have been impossible to live together under one roof in the first place.

Of course, even Valeria acknowledged Dimitar's ability as a Hiera Graphics and escort, but this and that were separate matters.

However, without breaking her usual cool smile, Karin shook her feathered folding fan while replying.

「Whether I'm interested in him, and whether I accept that personality of his which you've thoroughly disparaged, are talks for the future. However, is Richternach-kyou not a very good person at the present, I wonder?」

「Y, you flattered him too much, Karin...」

「It's because I've yet to experience his shortcomings. Even so, he can complete his jobs, have good looks, is young and healthy, and above all, the status as a person of the Richternach House is top class as a marriage partner. What he lacks is personal assets?」

「.....」

Hearing Karin's analysis, Valeria tried to think calmly.

Certainly, ignoring Dimitar's wicked tongue and insolent attitude, if she looked at him objectively without prejudice, then as a man, he might belong to the fairly popular category.

However, Valeria couldn't overlook those faults no matter what. Moreover, she had terrible experiences because of them, and thus she didn't agree to Karin's opinion upfront.

Did she deduce that from Valeria's murky expression? Karin shut the folding fan with a snap and raised her pearl pink lips.

「Rather, it might be assuring that you took such a stance. Just competing for the top seat against you is enough」

Valeria and Karin were originally neither acquaintances nor friends, but rivals who aimed to be a Dominas, and thus encountered each other during the intense competition. Eventually, Valeria became the top seat while Karin became the runner-up, and both fulfilled their dreams of becoming a Dominas, but perhaps their relation might have become one where they quarrelled very much.

Valeria gazed out of the window and sighed.

「Such concern is completely unnecessary. —In the first place, I absolutely detest choosing my marriage partner based on pedigree or fortune」

She then remembered venting her irritation at her father recently and became sullen again.



On the afternoon of that very same day, Crown Prince Jeffren Isaac summoned Home Minister Kamunyas-kyou to the glasshouse and asked him.

「Has Chichi-ue's letter arrived? Did it say anything?」

「Ha! ...It's concluded that he'll return from Taroma five days later...」

「That, saying five days later」

Pruning with a “pachi pachi” sound, Isaac raised his face from the roses.

「—Five days later from when? From when Chichi-ue write the letter or when the letter reached you?」

「Most likely, is it not five days after His Majesty has written the letter—」

「Fuun, ...elegant as usual」

「Indeed...」

Wiping his sweat with a handkerchief, Kamunyas looked downwards.

「So, is that all?」

「Ha?」

「Look here, I didn't dispatch a fast horse just to know when he'll return from his mistress's place, you know? Did he not write about other more important matters?」

「T, that—」

「Show it to me. That letter, you've it, right?」

Removing the glove, Isaac held out his hand towards Kamunyas.

Seemingly like a rose mania's hedonist, this young man was fairly perceptive. Kamunyas looked at the Crown Prince with upturned eyes and nervously took out a letter from his breast pocket.

「...Hee」

Reading the letter that the senior statesman had received from his father in one go, the Crown Prince raised his well-featured lips completely.

「It's unusual for him to praise me. I thought he'd be angry that I arbitrarily decided to exempt Seriba's taxation but—eh?」

Scrolling down the content of the letter, the Crown Prince's line of sight stopped suddenly.

「...It's written that all national politics will be entrusted to me in the absence of Chichi-ue? Is this fine?」

「Ha...since it's endorsed by His Majesty—」

「Fuun」

「N, nonetheless, you still have to consult with the senior statesmen in the end...」

「But of course, even I'd never think of becoming this country's dictator from just this one sentence. Or rather, being a dictator is surprisingly troublesome, right? You've to decide everything alone after all」

In Amaddo, the king was an existence that stood at the top of the government and also a religious leader who unified God's believers in the country. The king's words were absolute, and the roles of the senior statesmen who worked at the royal court were no more than his advisers to the end. Everything within the country was decided by the king, and that principle couldn't be changed.

「...Maa, that's why Chichi-ue takes a breather like this from time to time」

「Indeed...」

It was quite hard for the Crown Prince to approve and Kamunyas leaked a vague voice at his words without adding a response or a sigh.

「—Incidentally, is the appointed date for when Haha-ue returns from the royal villa known yet?」

「T, that...no, not yet...」

「That's bad」

Returning the letter to Kamunyas, the Crown Prince revealed a faint smile which couldn't be thought of as pleasant, put on the glove again and picked up the shears.

「—If Haha-ue returns from recuperation and the fact that Chichi-ue went to his mistress's place is exposed, it's possible that her condition will deteriorate again. In the worst case, it may develop into a divorce」

「B, but, what can—」

「I'll write a letter to Haha-ue and request for her to rest at the royal villa for the time being as there's disorder due to processing the aftermath of the Seriba's rebellion」

「That's a splendid idea—」

「Afterwards, it'll be great if the Biranoba's matter is settled promptly—by the way Kamunyas-kyou」

「Ha, hai?」

「Call Kaparos-kyou. Can I not confirm the budget, I wonder?」

「The budget—is it?」

「And call Barzari-kyou here too」

Kaparos and Barzari were senior statesmen who served as the Finance Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister respectively; together with the Home Minister Kamunyas and Military Minister Garido, they were referred to as the Amaddo's Four Elder Statesmen.

「W, why's it necessary to summon the both of them?」

「A budget is necessary for the Chivalric Order's manoeuvres, right?」

「Huh, manoeuvres!? Why at this kind of time!?!」

「It's precisely because it's this kind of time. ...We may have to force the Biranoba's government to accept negotiation when the necessity arises, so I made arrangements with Barzari-kyou」

「Your Highness...! What in the world are you trying to do!?!」

「Maa maa」

The Crown Prince cut a white rose and pushed it against Kamunyas; mixing in a hum, he went back to trimming the roses.

If one had to say, the father who was the king, was a man who expanded Amaddo's territory and thought of fighting against barbarous believers as his job—to say nicely, he was heroic; to say poorly, he was rough—and didn't meddle with domestic matters in details.

However, the son who was the Crown Prince appeared nonchalant, but was in fact shrewd and calculating. Simply put, his deepest thoughts were completely impalpable.

Therefore, Kamunyas couldn't fathom what the Crown Prince was trying to do at this point of time.

If it was this intelligent young man, he didn't appear likely to do

anything rash to harm the national interest, though the Crown Prince had the knack of making people worried from doing unimaginable things.



Having stopped en route for the night at a large relay station, Valeria's party arrived at Biranoba's capital city Buruan the next day.

As a friendly country since olden times, there was no inspection point to hinder people from travelling between Amaddo and Biranoba. Moreover, Buruan didn't have castle walls that should protect a capital.

A beautiful white-plastered castle towered at the top of a gentle hill, and town areas spread out in every direction with it as the centre. Without the demarcation of castle walls, Buruan was a large business city where people and articles went in and out freely regardless if it was day or night.

「Hee—」

Showing her face from the carriage's window, Valeria held down the hat atop her head and gazed at the castle.

「What a lovely castle, albeit slightly insecure. On such an open plains, and what's more, there's no castle walls. Can the capital be defended at the critical moment?」

「I don't think that critical moment will come」

Dimitar replied promptly from the coachman's pedestal.

「Biranoba is interposed between its allies, Amaddo and Diruma, with them on its east and west respectively. The possibility of an attack from foreign countries is exceedingly close to zero」

「Is that so?」

When Valeria looked back inside the carriage, Karin silently nodded.

「—It's also due to Buruan's national policy of not imposing tariff that there isn't a castle wall or gate. If merchants can go in and out freely without being imposed with tariffs, that alone will flourish business transactions」

Perhaps she heard Dimitar's words, Karin spoke in a low voice.

「...He's quite learned, isn't he? Having that kind of profound discernment, I think it'll be good for you to follow his example a little though」

「He just have a broad knowledge from running errands here and there during his Chivalric Order's days」

Hence, it wasn't unusual for Dimitar to have an extensive knowledge, but Valeria wasn't amused that Karin praised him and couldn't help but feel agitated. It seemed that even if Karin's high evaluation of Dimitar was a bad joke, she didn't seem to be teasing Valeria.

Valeria settled down onto the soft and fluffy seat, shut the feathered folding fan and adjusted her low-cut décolleté.

「—By the way Karin, what kind of person is your relative?」

「...The Valiente House is the home of my maternal grandmother. It's a noble family even in Biranoba and I heard that the current family head Dante serves as Biranoba's deputy prime minister」

「Ah, what a remarkable person」

「That being said, his age isn't that different from us though. ...If I remember correctly, he should be around nineteen」

「Eh!? He's a prime minister of a country at nineteen!?!」

「The deputy prime minister. ...But I think it's probably temporary

due to talks of succeeding his father who had passed away last year」

Karin mixed in a sigh and answered, then looked at Petra suddenly.

「Petra, inform Richternach-kyou of the route」

「Okay」

Petra opened the small window affixed right behind the coachman's pedestal and directed Dimitar the way to Valiente House's mansion. It seemed that the great nobles' residences in this Biranoba were mostly in the town's outskirts.

The path bordered by rows of cytiscus scoparius branched off from the centre of the tranquil rural districts and a white mansion's silhouette soon appeared on the other side.

Leaning out from the window again, Valeria tilted her head sideways.

「The castle and the street of stores and houses from some time ago are also like that, but this capital has numerous white buildings」

「...You, do you not know what the national flower of Biranoba is?」

Holding the bridles with his back curled up, Dimitar looked at Valeria over his shoulder. It was that usual cold look that scorned the other party.

「Eh? I, I don't know but—」

「There ought to have been plenty of time to prepare, yet what in the world were you doing?」

「What—」

「It's the basic of basics to investigate on the foreign country if you're going there on a mission. At any rate, you were probably choosing dresses instead of investigating sufficiently on Biranoba, right?」

「Ginuu...」

Since what Valeria had actually did first after receiving the Crown Prince's order was choosing dresses, she had no words for rebuttal. Averting his gaze from the young lady who was mumbling with a “mogo mogo”, Dimitar shrugged his shoulders.

「—Biranoba's national flower is the white lily. The Biranoba castle was painted with white plaster with that as an image and is called the White Lily Castle as its alias. It's for the same reason why the castle town's buildings are white. It seems that slaked lime is often gathered from the mountain district that is adjacent to Diruma's national border. High quality plaster is one of the country special products. Remember these well. Rather, you should have study beforehand. Your excessive ignorance affects not just me, but also Amaddo's honour」

「Mugigi...!」

To the valid reasoning that came directly from her front as always, Valeria could only clenched her fists tightly and withdrew into the carriage.

「...Sorry. I'm of the complete same opinion as him」

Undoubtedly dealt a blow by Karin, Valeria's face turned even redder and she shut the window.



When they passed through Valiente House's gate and approached the water fountain at the centre, the mansion's maids stood in a line and greeted the party.

「Don't lose focus」

Stopping the carriage before the foyer, Dimitar told Bettina in a low voice.

「—Carry as much luggage as you can. Although the other side will carry them too, you must carry your own luggage personally」

「I don't mind but...why?」

「I'll explain it eventually」

Dimitar leaped off from the coachman's pedestal, prepared a small stepladder and opened the carriage's door.

「Welcome, Karin-sama, Petra-sama」

The maids greeted Karin and Petra simultaneously when they descended from the carriage. It was likely that they had visited this places several times before. The thoroughly trained maids also didn't forget to greet Valeria who descended next.

Dimitar gave the custody of the carriage to a person of the mansion and carried twenty percent of the luggage himself while Bettina took the other eighty percent. Afterwards, Karin and the party stepped into the Valiente house.

「—Welcome, Karin. And also the guests」

Upon entering the spacious entrance hall, a clear voice resounded. From the second floor corridor of the hall, a young man wearing ceremonial clothes with long shirttail descended.

「That's him?」

Valeria raised a question, which was synonymous to her only, towards Karin in a low voice, but it was also heard by Dimitar.

Why did this girl ask every single thing that could be understood without thinking—Dimitar reflexively clicked his tongue and endured it, then causally observed this mansion's master.

Biranoba's Deputy Prime Minister, Dante Valiente, descended from the stairway slowly—according to the information that Dimitar had

learned beforehand, he followed his father's footsteps by becoming the prime minister though he was still nineteen this year. It was certain that he was a young and smart politician with a future of great expectations.

Dante's somewhat falsetto-like shrill voice irritated Dimitar slightly though and he didn't like it in any way.

Descending while touching his big and round red ringlets, Dante bowed and softly kissed the back of Karin's hand. Looking at Karin with upturned eyes, he muttered.

「How old are you again?」

「...You shouldn't have forgotten after seven years, right?」

「Hahaha, is that so?」

Dante narrowed his eyes and smiled, then took the hand of Valeria who was beside Karin.

「Pleased to meet you, Costacurta-geika. I'm Biranoba's Deputy Prime Minister, Dante Valiente」

「Pleased to meet you, Your Excellency. At your invitation, I'll be in your care and boldly intrude on you」

Although her facial expression seemed slightly stiff, her words flowed out carefully. Most likely, she had practised her speech in the carriage.

Dante finished greeting Petra too and finally, he looked towards Bettina rather than Dimitar.

「You're the Hiera Glaphicos, Richternach-kyou—, and this is?」

「I'm Valeria-sama's attendant, Bettina desu~」

「Attendant?」

Dante raised his eyebrows and stared at Bettina. Certainly, it was expected that he couldn't accept it immediately when a mass of short and stout pink armour introduced itself as an attendant. Karin then said to the puzzled Dante.

「...I'm sorry, there's a meaning behind this child's appearance. She won't be a bother and I guarantee her identity, so don't touch on this topic anymore」

「And I thought that such fashion is popular in Amaddo. —Is that an armour which somehow move on magic power?」

「Um, maa」

「As expected of the magic-advanced Amaddo. I'm envious that its magic engineering is making progress」

Dante smiled bitterly and invited the party inside.

At the passageway adjoined to the interior, a huge man with sharp eyes was standing there. It was obvious that he wasn't a retainer that performed routine duties in this mansion. He was probably a mercenary or something.

「He's a guard of this mansion, Salomon Puyol. Though he may be taciturn and unsociable, he's reliable and has served here since my father's generation」

「.....」

Dimitar secretly checked the hand of Salomon who bowed silently. The skin near the base of his right thumb was stiff and tough, probably a result from wielding a sword or spear for many years. He was definitely a soldier who had accumulated a considerable amount of experiences.

「The guest rooms have been prepared separately」

What Dante had personally guided them to, was a detached room

of the vast mansion on the first floor that faced the elegant courtyard. It was a room of first-class furniture and interior, making the inn where Dimitar usually stay seemed absurd and such room was prepared for every one of the five-person party.

「Please have a rest first. I shall have cold beverages prepared at once. Afterwards, someone will guide you around the mansion」

Bequeathing generosity typical of a master of a noble family that had continued for generations, Dante then stated that he had work to do and returned to his study.

「.....」

Exchanging looks with Valeria and the rest, Dimitar entered the room assigned to him and knocked on the wall and floor to check for the presence of secret path or hidden door before unpacking his travelling clothes.

「There's none here...though it won't be strange for the family head's room to have one or two secret passages」

Loosening his neck with a “koki koki”, Dimitar widened the collar of his outer garment and stepped forward to the bay window. A bed of beautiful flowers were blooming directly beneath the window. Since the window wasn't fitted fixedly, it was possible to go to Valeria or Bettina's rooms without passing through the mansion via this window. Naturally, he could use this to escape when the situation called for it.

While constructing an escape route in case of emergency within his head, Dimitar began changing his clothes. It was an exceeding troublesome task, but Dimitar had to attend this evening's party in light of his position. For Dimitar who hated formalities, passing time with a flawless and clear face as a member of the Richternach clan which was an Amaddo's noble family and above all else, as Valeria Costacurta's exclusive Hiera Glaphicos, was quite a torture. If this wasn't defined as part of the mission, he wanted to break the window and escape immediately.

「Dimita~r-san! Dimi-sa~n!」

The massive door was imprudently knocked on and pink's voice could be heard beyond it.

「Don't shorten people's name as you like. ...Be it you or Mercier, why do brats act over-familiar with everyone?」

Opening the door and inviting Bettina into his room, Dimitar fixed the cuffs of his white shirt and sighed.

「I don't want to be told that by Dimitar-san who calls people Gacha Pink desu~」

「So, what do you want?」

「Um—, it seems that a party will be held here tonight, but what shall I do~?」

「Standby in your room」

「Hai?」

「I said to standby in your room」

「W, w, why! Even I want to eat the good food at the banquet desuu!」

Bettina stomped her foot with a clatter. Annoyed by the tightness of the collar, Dimitar sat down on a chair.

「Then, I'll ask you couple of things but...did you bring a dress?」

「I didn't. I wasn't aware that there'll be a party...」

「It's because I never mentioned it」

「How cruel!」

「It's not like I was particularly told about this either. It was

because I guessed it somehow that I was prepared for it. —Do you get it? At the moment when you never thought through such things carefully, you're already unnecessary in tonight's party」

「T, this's discrimination desuyou!」

「Then, supposed you know it beforehand, can you prepare a dress that's expensive enough to build a small house?」

「Eh...? Build, a house...?」

「Isn't that obvious? It's a party gathered with people who wear such dresses you know? If it's a woman, she has to wear other necessities like necklace or rings. Though Her Eminences have fallen to ruins, they can prepare at least this much since they are originally from noble families. But it might be impossible for you? Even if you managed to borrow a dress somehow, do you know manners? Can you hold an acceptable and witty conversation without being impolite? What if a man invites you for a dance?」

Bettina crumbled down with a boisterous “gachaa!” sound from Dimitar's successive questions.

「It, it's impossible desuu...」

「I thought so」

Simply put, Bettina was just the niece of a chief engineer who worked for the Amaddo Kingdom's army. She was undoubtedly a commoner and by rights, far from participating in tonight's party, it was impossible for her to be invited to this mansion as a guest.

「...Maa, though I want to see you in an appearance besides the armour, give up on tonight. Above all, you can't endure the urge to pee during the party」

「Uuu...b, but, the banquet—」

「I'll bring the food to you somehow. ...Apart from that, you

absolutely cannot take that off」

「...Hai?」

「That Bachu something」

「You mean Bachururus?」

「Don't forget what the Chief Engineer said. That's a mass of highly classified information. Also, take care of that during the party. Watch over it properly」

Dimitar pointed towards Jagieruka that was leaning against the luggage while drinking the water from the pitcher.

「Eh? Why?」

「While I feel uneasy leaving it behind in this room, I can't bring such dangerous thing to the party's venue」

「When Dimi-san puts it that way, it's as if there's a thief in this mansion」

「It's not only this mansion. I'm always this cautious wherever it may be. Since you also brought along this pink armour, always act with this in mind. ...If that's stolen by chance, the one to be dismissed is your uncle」

「Oh, please don't threaten me」

「It's not a threat. It's a fact」

「...Somehow, it has become scary to be in this room alone...」

With her toes turned inwards, Bettina returned to her room feeling restless while grumbling. She was probably struggling against the urge to pee that assaulted her again.

Dimitar pulled the curtain across the bay window and lay down on the bed with Jagieruka held under his arm. He wasn't very tired in

particular, but his trait was to rest whenever it was time to do so.



That very same day, after he was summoned by the Crown Prince and talked about various things, Lucius managed to return home before meal. In the middle of changing clothes, he heard his mother returned home and became amazed.

「...Though I say this, it's rare for Haha-ue and I to return home before meal at the same time」

「It has been roughly ten days since the last time」

Thial who was assisting Lucius's change of clothes supplemented his mutter.

「In that case, I'll have my meal together with Haha-ue tonight since it's a rare occasion」

「Then it shall be so」

Fastening the belt of his gown and striking his side with a “pon”, Lucius went to the dining hall.

「—You're early today too」

When Lucius sat at the table first and drank his wine, Orvieto appeared after changing her clothes.

「It was His Highness's instruction for me to return home early and rest」

「...Is that boy planning to do something again?」

「Haha-ue」

Lucius picked up the cutlery and looked at his mother with upturned eyes. Orvieto held the most important post in the kingdom, but it bothered him whenever she said such disrespectful things from

time to time. From Orvieto's view, the Crown Prince Isaac was certainly a young man whose age wasn't that different from her son, but nevertheless, it was inexcusable to call him that way. It might even become a troublesome matter if someone from the castle heard it.

Swirling her glass wine, Orvieto said boldly.

「After all, he's currently doing something, right? Furthermore, he sent two Dominas to Biranoba. ...What on earth is he doing, I wonder?」

「As expected, it's something that I can't even tell Haha-ue」

Naturally, Lucius knew about the objective behind Valeria and party's trip to Biranoba, but even if the other party was Orvieto, he wouldn't tell her that.

「Setting my position as the magic academy's principal aside, I'm curious as Dii's guardian. ...Since Valeria-jou had set out, this means that child had also left, right?」

「I think you'll find out whether he's here if you go to the inn and check. ...And foremost, this's my first time hearing that Valeria-jou had set out」

「You're poor in lying and acting」

Orvieto pouted her lips slightly, placed the glass down and reached out for the serving of soup with warm steam rising up from it. Although a cuisine of roast mutton's tender shoulder meat, meatballs that used spices, and omelette with eel stuffing were spread out alongside on the table, Orvieto didn't eat much of those.

「—Incidentally, what's the task that you've to do?」

「Hai?」

「Boy—no, the Crown Prince said something, right? Resting your

body or the like」

「A manoeuvre is expected to begin soon. In that case, I may be absent from home for a few days」

「A manoeuvre, the Chivalric Order of bonbons?」 (TN: ボンボン means inexperienced young man from well-to-do family.)

「...You absolutely can't talk about this outside, Haha-ue. Including me, the gathering of bonbons is a fact」

「I'm very interested to see those bonbons leave their nest, and what kind of manoeuvre they'll do...perhaps this's also related to the Biranoba's case?」

「I cannot say that. If you want to know, please ask His Highness」

「I shall do so if I ever feel inclined to」

Saying so, Orvieto sipped her vegetable soup elegantly.

「—I wonder if Dii is eating properly?」

「It's all right. Unlike Haha-ue and I, Dii is a person who can prepare food by himself if there isn't any to eat. ...Besides, I think he should be surrounded by luxurious cuisine at around this time」

「That means Dii is currently at a place that can produce such cuisine? Where in the world can it be, I wonder?」

「.....」

Having carelessly talked about Dimitar's whereabouts, Lucius averted his mother's gaze.



The Valiente House seemed to possess more influence in Biranoba than Valeria had thought. That could be understood by judging the number of people assembled in tonight's party. This might be the true

influence held by an old family; a noble family that had preserved its prestige.

If the previous her, who had yet to become a Dominas, used the Costacurta House's name to gather people, Valeria was sure that she couldn't gather this much of them. However, it was likely that the Costacurta House should have boasted of a glory like this until her grandfather squandered the house away.

Valeria's dream was to regain the Costacurta House's former glory with her own strength.

—Nonetheless, the austerity forced onto Valeria because of that was harsher than she imagined.

「Is Valeria-jou already playing an active role as a Dominas in her country?」

「Exactly, please let us hear what sort of activities you've performed until now」

「That's...well...」

Surrounded by young nobles who had reached adulthood, Valeria made sure that her smile didn't cramp with the utmost efforts. Speaking of party, it was the same even in Amaddo where Valeria was encircled by people, but the sense of distance of every person here was unusual. Simply put, it was the first that she felt swarmed by curiosity.

「Most of the work that I engaged in is related to the country's highly classified information, so—」

She couldn't say that she had only completed one mission until now and that she was here now for her second mission—, hence she properly evaded the topic.

「Even that sort of matters are entrusted to Dominas?」

「I certainly thought that you'd be offering prayers to Redountra every day at the temple」

「Though I want to experience that kind of tranquil day, I'm a Dominas as well as a High Grade Inspector of Amaddo, so I'm busy one way or another...」

Although Valeria concealed her lips with the feathered folding fan and laughed elegantly with an “ohohohoho”, she was emotionally worn out.

In short, Dominas were rare existences for the Biranoba's nobles.

Certainly, Dominas were people with rare talents and there were only twelve of them on the continent, but before that, magic warriors were scarce in Biranoba. Since Biranoba didn't have a Dominas, there was neither an official organisation to research magic nor a specialised organisation to manage magic warriors. Also, talents who possessed magic power had left the country repeatedly, and eventually, magic warriors who could use magic on a practical level were almost non-existent in Biranoba now.

Valeria Costacurta was a magic warrior who possessed the strongest power in the continent and also a Dominas; though she might be an object of interest and longing rather than an object of reverence to them. Obviously, her charm as a woman was involved to some extent seeing that they were periodically throwing glances towards her low-cut area; nevertheless, that didn't become much of a consolation to her.

One of the young nobles then asked Valeria who casually shifted the position of the shawl on her shoulders to reduce her skin exposure.

「I heard that Valeria-jou is sixteen, but how long does a Dominas's duty lasts?」

「It's usually nine years」

「Which means...you've to dedicate your purity to God until you completed your duty at twenty-five?」

「That's a waste—」

Valeria heard his muttering mingled with an unpretentious sigh and nearly spouted out instinctively.

「Iya, if it's Valeria-jou, she'll become more beautiful nine years later」

「Then I'll also try to lead an honest life of abstinence for nine years」

Unable to tell if these young men were joking or being serious, Valeria naturally responded with a forced smile and ran her gaze around quickly.

In this numerically inferior situation of one against many, there was a limit to continuing her lady facade. At this rate, she might either reveal her usual determined face and draw the surrounding's attention or faint from the mental suffocation.

In order to overturn this situation, Valeria surveyed her surrounding in hope of a friendly support. Unfortunately, the figure of Karin who was the most reliable couldn't be found and Petra didn't noticed Valeria's pinch as she was chatting happily with women who seemed to be her old friends. Since Bettina didn't come to this place from the start, this being the case, there was one more person whom Valeria could rely on—.

「—!?」

As Valeria was amazed, she involuntarily ended up looking again.

Similarly to how Valeria was surrounded by dressed up young men tonight, Dimitar was also encircled by ladies in lovely dresses. On top of that, what on earth was he talking about with a flattering smile which she had never seen before? And was he not making the women

laughing?

While Valeria was surprised that the youth didn't even slip up at this kind of place, she was also seething in anger with a "futsu futsu" at the same time.

Even if he didn't know them, he was able to act cordially with women whom he had just met today and didn't know if they'd meet again after this. Yet why wasn't he able to do the same to her who was his superior? She wouldn't have mind if it was just that, but why did he keep repeating mannerism that irritated her—.

She barely maintained her composure when she began to think of that. At the very least, she couldn't make a smile for the party.

「...Valeria-jou?」

Did he notice Valeria creasing her brow deeply? A young man then called out to her quizzically.

「Ah, n, no, it's nothing—」

Valeria, who blinked her eyes hurriedly and somehow erased her stern expression, replied with a surprised voice and fell into a slight panic.

When Valeria calmed down her agitation and glared at Dimitar with a "girori", their lines of sight coincided.

「.....」

Receiving Valeria's gaze that was filled with slight anger and irritation, Dimitar surprisingly didn't ignore it. After bowing to the surrounding women and slipping out from the centre of that encirclement, he approached Valeria.

「Pardon me for intruding on your chat. —Your Eminence」

「Ha, hai?」

「There's something that I want to tell you」

Dimitar gave a meaningful bow and glanced towards the balcony fleetingly.

「—Everyone, please excuse me for a while」

Valeria informed the young men and proceeded to the balcony with Dimitar.

「What on earth do you want to talk about?」

When Valeria asked in half relief and half irritation, Dimitar resumed his usual brazen countenance and snorted.

「I've no need for you specifically. And there's nothing to talk about either」

「Hai?」

「I only used that as a pretext to bring you out here simply because you made a sullen expression. Aren't you troubled because you were surrounded by those youngsters?」

「Err—」

「Am I mistaken? If I misunderstood, then return quickly」

「Ah, no no no, y, you aren't wrong, um—」

She'd be embarrassed if she admitted it, however the cause of Valeria's sullenness was Dimitar rather than those young men. But to complain though she was expressly brought out here, and in addition, she was actually feeling embarrassed knowing that Dimitar was observing her, hence she wasn't able to reply in any way.

「Was it hard pretending?」

When Dimitar sighed greatly, he leaned against the balcony's handrail and laughed derisively.

「—However, they're desperately putting up a pretence too」

「Huh? Those people?」

「Yes. They're fully aware of the merits of marrying a former Dominas」

「Merits?」

Valeria ceased the insignificant shaking of her feathered folding fan and asked a question in return.

「...You kept them company without knowing such a thing?」

Dimitar became astonished, then sighed again and said.

「For people who possess magic ability and promote themselves highly, it's natural but they'll go to the place that give them the highest evaluation. In that sense, Biranoba may be the best. In any case, this country doesn't have a Dominas and lacks magic war potential. If it's in such a country, a Dominas is valued highly even though she's retired」

「Retire—, I'm not retiring yet!」

「Hence the talk of nine years later. Even I'll be troubled if you retired now. —However, they may be relatively serious in proposing to you even after nine years, you know? It doesn't mean the Dominas's skills will decline suddenly just because she retired. Also, just by having a magic warrior among the relatives may be greatly linked to a successful life in this country」

「They...they're proposing to me for that...?」

「If you think of it as a kind of political marriage, then it's more than probable. They seek neither beauty nor assets nor political strength in their spouses, but purely magic powers」

「.....」

In that situation, it was as if she was told that she had nothing to boast to other people except her magic ability.

When Valeria thought so, she unconsciously grumbled that aloud.

「...You」

Hearing Valeria's grumble by chance, Dimitar looked down on the girl coldly.

「If the title of Dominas and magic talent are taken away from you, what's left of you then?」

「Eh? Of course, that's—」

「Besides your father's fortune, it's your appearance and youth」

Dimitar cut Valeria off and said so when she tried to list them one-by-one.

「Even Biranoba has plenty of beautiful girls from wealthy families. If they want that sort of marriage partner, it isn't necessary for them to expressly search for a noble's daughter from outside the country」

He said those words bluntly and left the balcony.

「What, that...!」

Valeria's cheeks twitched and she saw off Dimitar's back.

「There's nothing left of me if my title and magic are taken away!? Who is!? ...No, he didn't say nothing remains though. Even so, saying that father's fortune, my youth and my appearance are all that I'm left with is—」

Valeria released a sigh mixed with anger and leaned against the balcony. While tapping the feathered folding fan on her shoulder, she looked down at the garden below.

「...Hmm?」

She couldn't see clearly since the starlight was insufficient, but there were two figures nestled closely under the shade of a tree.

「.....」

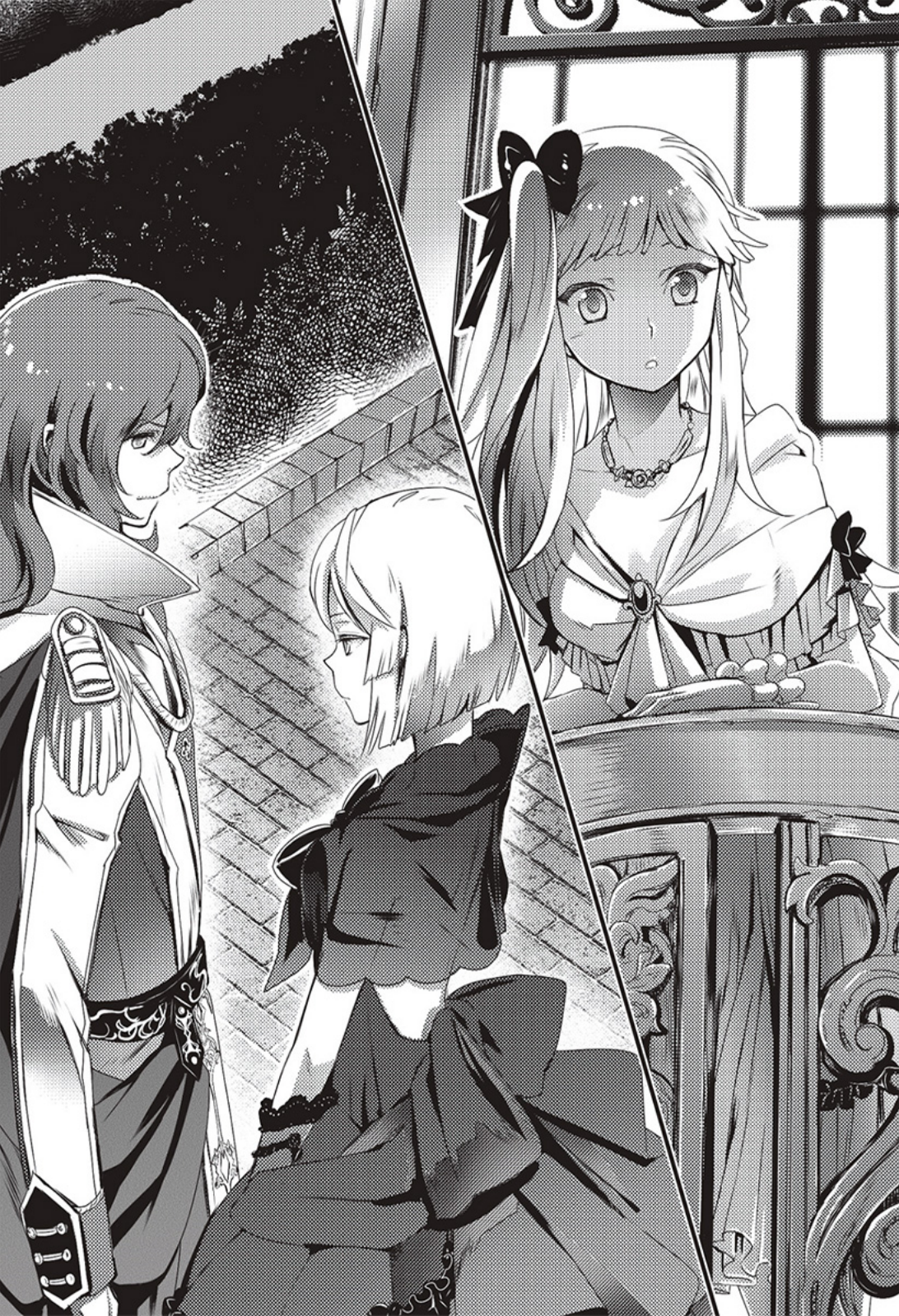
Valeria returned to the hall from the balcony and closed the glass door with her hands held behind her.

She tried to observe the hall's interior again, but Karin wasn't anywhere as expected. Moreover, Dante who should be the host didn't seem to be around too.

She could easily guess who the pair of silhouettes at the shade of the tree from a while ago belonged to.

「...Aren't you unexpectedly quick to settle things?」

Valeria spread the folding fan to conceal half of her face and proceeded to the table that was lined up with cuisine.





In Amaddo, the earliest age when people began training was seven or eight, while even the latest would be before their twelfth birthday should they decide to become a Dominas.

To begin the training meant engraving magic crests onto the skin first, followed by studying usage of elementary magic. Karin was a child who memorised quickly, but nonetheless she was ten when she chose this path, hence that time when the magic crests were first carved onto her remained in that girl's mind even now.

Although more than half of the girls aimed to become a Dominas, did they feel the lack of talent or could they not endure the pain of having magic crests drawn on them? They'd abandoned their dream half a year after the training started. Thus in the midst of the harsh competition, Karin publicly became a Dominas with her natural ability, endeavour and some help from luck.

The last time that she visited the Valiente House was when she was ten, before she participated in the training, and thus this was her first visit in seven years since she seldom left Roma during the training.

The traces of those days when she played hide and seek in this garden as a child were already gone.

「After father's death, I was made to take over the reins」

Dante smiled at Karin while guiding her through the garden at night.

「—Since I'll be the one supporting this Valiente House after my late father」

「It came to the point where you want to paint it in your colour—right?」

「Maa is it something like that? ...There are expectations that young generations like us will be the ones to support this country」

「.....」

Karin looked up at the balcony where boisterous laughter could be heard faintly and gave a small sigh.

「...Did you form a personal connection with me too for that? You're ambitious like your Chichi-ue」

The Dante Valiente in Karin's memories was a slightly precocious boy of twelve years, but the Dante whom she met again after seven years was a young and already splendid head of the Valiente House. He was currently the deputy prime minister as a proxy for his father who died suddenly, but if it was this young man, he might seize a post above that eventually with just his true strength.

「You were brought up in Amaddo all this time so you may not know it intuitively but」

Dante walked to the square gazebo at the corner of the garden to distance themselves from the loud noise that had escaped, offered a bench to Karin and continued speaking.

「—Our Biranoba's situation is extremely delicate」

「Is it because it's between two large countries?」

「That's exactly the problem. ...The peace that Biranoba presently has comes from the geographical condition of lying in between the major powers that are Amaddo and Diruma. Our peace is protected by these countries' military forces」

「Is there a problem with that?」

「Military-wise, Biranoba is compelled to depend on Amaddo and Diruma and has to bear a portion of both countries' enormous amount of war funds annually as collateral. ...But if I'm allowed to say, then that's a completely needless expenditure」

「...It's not unnecessary, isn't it?」

「Originally, we should be carrying weapons ourselves to protect the country. However, the current us don't have that weapons. As a result from bearing a portion of both countries' war funds, there's no surplus for possessing weapons」

「...Isn't it the same at the end?」

「It's different」

Dante sat on the bench opposite of Karin, looked up at the moon and shook his head exaggeratedly. Each of his theatrical actions hadn't changed from the time when he was a child.

「—That's a state of overly lax servitude. Even you've seen the old map at least, right? The Biranoba from before boasted a territory that was almost twice of the current, but those plots of land belong to Amaddo and Diruma now. ...Do you know why?」

「I'm sorry...I'm not interested in history. And this isn't my motherland either」

「This's also your grandmother's birthplace」

「...That's true」

Although Karin brushed it off curtly, she undoubtedly understood why historical context became so. Biranoba was forced to cede its territory to both countries because it had become an undeveloped country in magic and wasn't able to produce a Dominas successively, thus burdening Amaddo with the training of Dominas. In regards to the enormous expense that was essential to train Dominas perpetually, Biranoba which had lost its Dominas had to cede its territory—or dowry so to call it—.

「If there was a power in our country, without losing a Dominas, our territory wouldn't have to be ceded. The stipulation that Biranoba had with Amaddo at that time clearly—」

「...Is there any meaning explaining that to me now?」

Fanning Dante's face gently with her feathered folding fan, Karin interrupted her childhood friend's speech.

「If you want to reproach your processors' folly, I think it's better to do so to your heart's content at your royal court. ...However, telling me that is barking up the wrong tree. Since I'm part of the Amaddo's government, I'm not in the position to interfere」

「But there's a power in you too」

「...Power?」

Karin wasn't sure what kind of talk Dante was trying to bring up and knitted her eyebrows. As expected, she shouldn't have a face-to-face talk with Dante. To begin with, Karin and party came to Biranoba to search for Quique's assistant, a woman named Nereida. She didn't have the leisure to engage in reminiscent talk with Dante here.

「...Do you remember the last time when you spent the summer here?」

Dante said so while fiddling with his quirky forelocks.

「At that time, I received such a shock when I heard that we couldn't meet for a while because you'd be gone for training」

「...Such a thing might have happened」

「The words that I told you at this square gazebo on that day wasn't a joke or anything, but have you forgotten them already?」

「...What were they?」

Although Karin had searched through her memories and recalled those words accurately, she took it upon herself to feign ignorance and looked away. Just then, the moon in the night sky was obscured by the thin clouds and its brightness weakened. For better or worse, the mood didn't turn bad.

「You're heartless. ...I asked if you'd marry me, you know?」

「I'm sorry. I don't remember」

「Even now, my feelings haven't change」

「Even if that's so, I cannot respond to it」

「I understand that as a Dominas, you're obligated to maintain your purity」

Dante shrugged his shoulders and stood up.

「—I've waited for seven years. Therefore, I believe there's no reason why I can't wait for another nine years」

「...Are you serious?」

「I'm serious」

「...However, if I were to collate and contemplate the preceding conversations, then it's because you want my magic talent after all, isn't it?」

「You've been an intelligent woman since the old times, so glossing it over poorly may also be pointless, and above all, I want to be honest to you so I'll say this clearly. ...I certainly want your magic talent」

「.....」

「However, genuinely wanting to marry you is my true feelings. Was there any man besides me who had proposed to you before knowing you've magic talent?」

He really hadn't changed.

Seeing Dante spoke with his hand placed on his chest, Karin thought so. Dante Valiente was a person who did everything grandiosely, pompously and never tried to hide his desire. Needless to

say, he should bear in mind to be self-effacement since he lived in a political world, but even so, that essential part from when he was a boy seemed to remain in him.

Karin rose up from the bench and proffered her right hand to Dante.

「...The host can't be absent forever, can he? Let's return soon」

「I still haven't hear you answer」

「You know that it's not something which can be answered at once, right?」

「Maa, you're right」

「Your response to my appeal is exceeding low. ...I'm a daughter of the Rudbeck House, you know?」

「If you give birth to two sons, the eldest and second son can be the heirs to the Valiente and Rudbeck House respectively」

「...Don't tell Valeria this」

「Why?」

「.....」

Karin closed her mouth and let Dante led her by hand in silence.

If Valeria heard Dante's words, she'd likely jump for joy at the loophole whereby she, who was a daughter and heiress, could get married to Lucius. Irrefutably, if she resorted to such method, then the Costacurta and Richternach Houses could attain heirs. And if it was a girl like Valeria, then she might coolly give birth to around two or three healthy children.

However, Karin somehow thought that it might not go well with Valeria and Lucius, and felt vaguely uneasy.

Chapter 03 - His and Her Secret

In Amaddo, the task of engraving magic crests was permitted only to special Hiera Glaphicos affiliated to the magic academy. Basically, one must have his/her magic crests engraved by a Hiera Glaphicos after obtaining the magic academy's approval to become a magic warrior.

Thus, all magic warriors within Amaddo's jurisdiction—except unlicensed and wandering magic warriors— were placed under its control.



Generally, such circumstances weren't much different even in other countries. And it was known that the Hiera Glaphicos in the magic-advanced Amaddo drew magic crests of good efficiency with precision. That might also be the cause of Valeria and Karin attaining their reputation as excellent Dominas.

Having rested comfortably for the first time in a while at home, Lucius Richternach who was summoned by Jeffren Isaac on the next day appeared at the Crown Prince's glasshouse.

「—Did you call for me, Your Highness?」

「Yes」

While trimming the roses like usual, the Crown Prince began to talk suddenly without looking back at Lucius.

「Did everyone have a good sleep yesterday?」

「Ha」

Yesterday, Isaac didn't tell only the Seal Chivalric Order's Vice-Leader Lucius to rest at home. All members of the Chivalric Order were also similarly notified.

In the case of noble youngsters, resting at one's home meant using a good mantle to visit the pleasure quarters of the night frequently, showing up at a mansion's party of some place or abstaining from such nightlife to rest obediently at home. Lucius could resort to ordering for a minor house-arrest, but in any case, any member who disregarded the Crown Prince's order and indulged in nightlife might very well incur his displeasure.

「It's splendid if you've rest well. Then, it's been a while, but let's go on a long trip」

「Is it an expedition...?」

「It's nothing too exaggerated. We aren't specifically going to war. ... Ma, I want to hunt for foxes though」

「Where'll we be going? Is it near Gruma forest?」

「It's not good playing dumb, Lucius-kun」

Handing over his gloves that had released the pruning shears to the page, the Crown Prince turned around towards Lucius.

「—Why'd I go to Gruma or the like with everybody for a duration of several days?」

「I think Your Highness is going personally to receive the queen under the pretext of fox hunting. In these recent times where people are feeling insecure, it's necessary to assign escorts for the queen's return—」

「Though that may be so, I'll be troubled if Haha-ue doesn't keep on resting until Chichi-ue returns from his mistress's place」

「Then where'll it be?」

「I think the vicinity around Reman is good」

「It's not possible to hunt foxes there」

「Is that so?」

「It's also close to Biranoba's national border」

「That's an unexpected surprise」

「Good grief...who's the one that's feigning ignorance?」

Lucius mixed in a small mutter to his bitter smile.

Reman was a relay station that was near Biranoba's national border. The surrounding was a gentle hilly area where meadows and vineyards spread out, and it wasn't a plot of land with numerous foxes that could make hunting possible. It was evident that the Crown Prince's objective wasn't fox hunting.

「—Ma, can you dispatch a fast horse to Reman immediately and secure lodging place first? We'll depart in the noon. ...It's possible, right?」

「Of course. On top of being notified to rest at home, the Seal Chivalric Order's members are also prepared for emergencies」

「That's true」

The Crown Prince returned the cuffs of his blouse to their original positions and left the glasshouse.

「—If we don't put the heat on those noble bonbons periodically, they'll become lax at once. If there are people who haven't assemble at the departure time, expel them immediately」

「Acknowledged」

「Though there are a lot of people who want to join the Seal Chivalric Order, somehow they merely think of the Chivalric Order as

something like a close friend's club. It might be like that previously, but if it doesn't change gradually」

Narrowing his eyes at the morning's sunlight, the Crown Prince placed his hands on his waist.

In the current situation where the king was travelling incognito to his mistress's territory, and the queen returning home to recuperate from her illness, it was debatable if it was good or bad for even the Crown Prince to leave the capital. It was likely that the ministers weren't happy about it, but this Crown Prince hardly yielded once he had spoken out. At first glance, he seemed frail, but his ability to persist in his own thoughts was undoubtedly inherited from his father. He might have already forced the ministers to accept this time's "hunting" too.

「...Lucius-dono, Lucius-dono!」

From the shade of a tree, the Home Minister beckoned to Lucius who had parted from the Crown Prince.

「What's it, Kamunyas-kyou?」

「As expected, the talk with His Highness is about his foreign travel to Biranoba...?」

「Foreign travel? Iya, he said that he's going fox hunting since the Chivalric Order is doing manoeuvres」

「Like-I-said! That's a pretence, right? To begin with, where did he say he's going hunting?」

「Reman...」

「Hora! Reman! Isn't fox hunting impossible in such a place?!」

「That's my sentiment too」

Lucius smiled bitterly again and pacified the minister who had

numerous worries.

「—It'll be all right, Kamunyas-kyou. Though it's difficult to understand what His Highness is thinking, he isn't the kind of person who'd damage the national interest with his ideas and jokes. Isn't that evident from his ability whereby he skilfully managed the recent revolt?」

「I acknowledged that point but...Biranoba is an old ally, and if some troublesome problems arise under His Highness's judgement when His Majesty is currently absent—」

This minister's thumbnail was worn-out whenever Lucius saw it. He seemed to have the tendency of chewing it and fretting immediately when things involved him.

「...Lucius-dono! I don't think His Highness will change his mind even if we protest now. If that's the case, there's no other alternative but to rely on Lucius-dono for the rest! Please stay close to His Highness and keep an eye on him so that he doesn't do reckless things. Please, I beg of you...!」

「I shall do so despite my poor ability...」

Lucius resisted spouting anything out again and nodded slightly.



As one would expect, although the crowd in Buruan lost to Roma's by a level, its streets were considerably lively.

However, even if Valeria viewed the townscape that was overflowing with liveliness, her heart was subtly clouded. She had been feeling like that since last night.

「...If the title of Dominas and magic ability are taken away from me, only my father's fortune, my youth and my appearance remain —」

While gazing out from the carriage's window absentmindedly, Valeria muttered.

「Apart from my father's fortune; this means that he acknowledged me as a talented and beautiful girl, right? He has no choice but to acknowledge it, right?」

「Valeria?」

「If he acknowledged me as a perfect talented woman, then why does he take on that sort of disrespectful attitude? Isn't it odd? And yet he greeted the other women smilingly—」

「Hey, Valeria?」

「If the other party is a young, talented and beautiful girl, won't an average man treat her more gently? He's definitely not an average man, but even so—」

「Hey, Valeria?」

Having her elbow grasped and shaken, Valeria finally came to her senses.

「Huh?」

「...What were you muttering about since some time ago? Are you all right?」

「Hai? Ah, yes, I'm fine, I'm fine」

Realising that Karin, Petra and even Dante's gazes were focused on her, Valeria corrected her sitting posture.

「Is there something inadequate in this house's service?」

「No, it's extravagant」

Valeria dispelled Dante's concern with a smile, and whispered to Karin secretly while hiding her mouth behind the folding fan.

「—I'd like to hear your opinion a little」

「...What's it?」

「I shall say this, but it's a metaphor, okay?」

「...So what's it exactly?」

「Suppose there's a beautiful girl here; an almost impeccable child gifted with both intelligence and beauty」

「And?」

「Assuming there's a man who despite not bearing a grudge against such a beautiful girl specifically calls her names, looks down on her and occasionally exerts minor violence on her etc.; anyway, he only takes on those kinds of detestable attitudes towards her, then, what do you suppose that guy is thinking?」

「...That man's mentality?」

「Yes」

Karin narrowed her eyes and stared at Valeria fixedly.

「...Excuse me, did this beautiful girl really not do anything to that man?」

「Eh?」

「Thinking sensibly, it's unlikely he'd go that far when nothing was done to him. There definitely must be something」

「None, none! There's definitely none! To go to that extent even though there's nothing!」

「...Why're you insisting on that so much?」

「Well, that's—」

「What kind of talk is this exactly?」

「It's a secret talk between just the two of us behind closed doors, don't dwell on it too much~」

Seeing Valeria panicked, Dante and Petra interrupted.

「...Just nice. You should listen to an opinion from a man's view」

Valeria couldn't stop her in time. Karin precisely narrated the metaphor that she had heard from her friend and made Dante listened to it. Dante then put his hand on his chin and pondered,

「...Such a thing is unrelated to gender. Wouldn't a person usually not adopt such an attitude when there's no grudge?」

「Unless that man has a great persecution complex, it's certainly improbable」

With a “poya~”, Petra then continued in a somewhat dragging tone.

「—However, this may actually be a simpler matter」

「Simpler?」

「Hora, isn't this often the case with children? They inadvertently become mean when they're too conscious of the child whom they like」

「Eh? Then this's that...?」

「What do you mean by that?」

「Ah!? Y, you're wrong! It isn't particularly—」

Valeria tremblingly shook her head, discontinued the topic and hurriedly pointed out of the window.

「Ah, what's your impression of the tailors in this town? I kind of

want to take a quick look for a while!」

「No no, since Biranoba follows Amaddo's fashion, I'm not sure if there's anything that can please Valeria-jou—」

「...But isn't Buruan's cotton fabrics of good quality?」

「Anything is fine. We can't even stroll freely on the streets back home」

Valeria—and Karin too—was known by everybody in Amaddo. She might be surrounded by a crowd immediately if she carelessly showed her face in the castle town. However, Valeria wasn't that much of a celebrity in Biranoba. At the very least, the people who knew that Valeria and Karin were the neighbouring country's Dominas upon seeing them should be almost zero.

Visiting the tailor of the hat that Dante's mother often used when she was alive, Karin nonchalantly drew near and whispered when they were trying on various hats.

「...The previous conversation wasn't just a metaphor, right?」

「Huh?」

「Does it concerns Richternach-kyou?」

「I, it isn't specially like that—maa, it's true that man has a sharp tongue though」

「Is that so?」

Placing a vivid hat adorned with feathers of southern countries' birds atop her head, Karin gazed at the mirror with Valeria alongside her.

「.....」

It was hard to read the mind of this indifferent lovely girl from her expression. Since it wasn't clear whether Karin had read her thoughts,

Valeria was in no way comfortable. Even in the worst case, she didn't want to be wrongly suspected as being strangely conscious of Dimitar. But nonetheless, if she denied it verbally, it might become a weird situation where that'd be taken as an affirmation instead. And since it seemed that even Petra and Dante could hear them, Valeria ended up not saying anything.

「—B, by the way Karin」

While looking at Dante who was discussing something with the shop's proprietor across the mirror, Valeria suddenly recalled about last night.

「You slipped out with him during last night's party and were wandering around the garden, right? What were you doing exactly?」

「...Nothing. Just an idle chat」

Placing the hat that she had worn atop Petra's head, Karin replied monotonously.

「If it was just an idle chat, then it wasn't necessary to leave the hall secretly. ...What in the world did you talk about?」

「...I was proposed to」

「Eh!?!」

「...Your voice is too loud」

Rebuking Valeria who raised a surprised voice, Karin glanced towards Dante.

This was prevalent in this sort of shops for nobles, but a corner of this vast shop interior looked out to a sunny courtyard where Dante and the proprietor were drinking black tea on a table that was prepared over there. If one was to notice the shop interior, it was likely that Dante had reserved it as Valeria and party were the only people choosing commodities.

With a voice that wasn't audible to Dante, Karin continued in her usual tone.

「...It isn't something surprising in particular」

「Is, is that so...?」

「Dante has been fond of Karin since childhood, hasn't he?」

While varying the angle of the hat, Petra muttered as if she was unrelated.

「I definitely thought of it as a joke that children often say~」

「...He seems serious, doesn't he?」

「And I was insignificant since the olden days~. I was a little jealous that it was always Karin who was popular~」

「...If it's Dante, I can yield him to you」

「That way of speaking somehow irritates me~」

Petra returned the hat to Karin's head with a “bafun” and separated from them. Valeria alternated looks between the slender retreating figure and the expressionless Karin's face,

「...Does Petra likes Dante-san by chance...?」

「...That's not it, I think. Like what the person herself said, she's only irritated by my way of speaking. Probably」

Returning the slightly contorted hat to its original spot, Karin rearranged her dishevelled hair.

「...I've told you this before that Petra and I are long-time close cousins, and it's enviable that I've such a partner as my Hiera Glaphicos, haven't I?」

「Eh, uh huh...」

「...The relationship between Petra and I isn't that good. Though needless to say, it isn't bad either」

「Is, is that how it is?」

「...Even Petra was originally the same as me. She aimed to be a Dominas to raise the Rudbeck House to its prime, you know? Compared to our relationship, it's an even more open rivalry, I guess? In addition, Petra lost the competition and became my Hiera Glaphicos, so it's not like she won't feel frustrated or envious」



「But she's smiling to that extent...」

「That's her characteristic. She's the type of child who'd pinch people's arms while smiling」

「I may not be in a position to interfere, but are you guys all right?」

「...Both Petra and I intend to rebuild the Rudbeck House, so we won't do something like obstructing each other. One way or another, we're cousins and childhood friends」

“Apart from that—,” Karin continued in a whisper.

「Is your side all right instead? I don't want us to be caught up in your bad relation」

「That's maa—」

Valeria wanted to refute by saying “even we understand our situation, so don't worry”, but putting aside Dimitar, Valeria wasn't very confident if she could get along well with Dimitar.



And now, while Valeria and party were sightseeing the streets of Biranoba with Dante who had taken a day off from government duties.

Dimitar wanted to accompany them to grasp the geography of the town, but upon thinking that carrying his huge sword with him was uncivil, and was likely to attract attention instead, he decided to remain in the mansion. He also felt uneasy leaving Bettina alone.

After swinging his sword for a while in the room, Dimitar went to the kitchen and prepared a bacon and cheese baguette sandwich. The homemade bacon was seasoned perfectly, and he was sure that the baguette sandwich would be delicious by using it.

Tossing the just finished sandwich, an apple and a bottle of wine

into a basket, Dimitar returned to his detached room.

The mansion was deserted in the early afternoon, as if last night's hustle and bustle was a lie. The servants of such a place didn't make a noise or arbitrarily take a nap just because their master was absent. They simply performed their own tasks quietly and indifferently.

However, in regards to the huge man who stood motionlessly at the end of the long corridor, what on earth could his job be?

「.....」

It was the man introduced by Dante when he arrived here yesterday. Salomon Puyol; although he worked as the mansion's guard, he was probably a Valiente House's private soldier. If it was this noble family that had produced the country's senior statesmen over many generations, it'd be unnatural instead if it didn't employ such people.

That huge man stared fixedly at Dimitar who was about to return to his room.

According to others, it might be seen as two people on the verge of clashing. In any case, they had swords hanging on their waists and it seemed to be two swordsmen mutually examining their opponents.

However, before the atmosphere between them began to tingle with scorching heat, Salomon bowed lightly and turned on his heels.

「...That's definitely a face of having killed people before」

Sighing quietly, Dimitar started to move again.

「—Oi」

Returning back to the detached rooms, Dimitar knocked on the door of Bettina's room and turned the knob without waiting for a reply.

「Dibida~ru-zaan!」

When he opened the door, a pink armour came tackling towards him with a noisy “gacha gacha” sound.

「...Do you not understand what I’ve said?」

「Uguu」

Evading deftly, Dimitar struck the back of Bettina’s head lightly and gave a cold look towards the little girl who had lost her balance and fallen prostrate.

「Why isn’t the door locked? You’re careless」

「T, that’s desune...」

Bettina stood up with a “gachori” and peered into Dimitar’s basket while explaining.

「I was so hungry that I went to the corridor to check if Dimitar-san hasn’t come back early many times! Even last night, I didn’t get any treats—」

「People won’t die even if they forego one meal」

「I’ve heard that already! But this isn’t a question of dying or not, it’s a question of eating or not desuu!」

「I don’t understand what you’re saying very well, but I’m sure that you’re hungry」

Dimitar locked the door and placed the basket on the table.

「—So, did anything change?」

「Nothing in particular desuu」

Bettina bit into the baguette sandwich that she had promptly took out from the basket and replied so.

「—By the way Dimitar-san, what's your impression of the party in such a place?」

「It's roughly as you've imagined」

「Roughly as my imagination? Is that true?」

「Yeah. It isn't that great to be constantly serious. And a while ago, you complained that you didn't get any cuisine, but even I didn't eat decently. Though the food was there, I didn't have the time to eat」

「Is that so?」

「At best, I've tasted them. And a person who eats greedily at that sort of place wouldn't be invited in the first place. ...Try and think, an affluent noble wouldn't be so greedy, right?」

Unsheathing Jagieruka halfway from its scabbard, Dimitar checked its blade.

「Then, if a suspicious person was at such a place, you'd naturally realise it at once, right? —So, was Oji-sama's acquaintance present?」

「At the party? If you say suspicious, then Her Eminence was acting the most suspicious, but it seemed that the woman in question wasn't there」

「Is that person really in this country?」

Cutting the apple skilfully with a knife, Bettina opened her visor briefly with a “baja!”, threw it inside and continued to chew on her meal without exposing her face, and unhesitatingly said something that could shake the mission from its core.

「It's possible that she isn't in this country from the beginning」

「...The one who received that person's letter from this country is none other than your uncle, you know? She's definitely in this country」

「But~, that doesn't prove she's still here, does it?~」

「...Certainly, it's possible that she isn't here already. —But in Biranoba where magic warriors are scarce, magic engineering researchers are valued higher than them. Thus, here ought to be a good place for people with such skills to reside」

「Is that how it is?」

「That's right. ...To begin with, have you really not seen that woman even once? I heard that she researched together with the Chief Engineer in the workshop, you know?」

「N~...」

Bettina replied after brooding a while.

「...There was only Oji-sama in that workshop by the time I started living with him, so I've never seen that person before」

It didn't seem like the girl's usual tone and felt lonely in some respects.

Come to think of it, why did this girl live with her uncle instead of her parents? Were her parents dead or was she abandoned by them?

However, Dimitar didn't pry into it. If he had to say, it was because she resembled him. What happened to your parents, and why aren't you living with them? —To Dimitar, it wasn't a very pleasant feeling being inquired about this and that.

Hence, Dimitar didn't drag on that topic anymore.

Dimitar rolled up the cuff of his right sleeve from the back of his hand to his elbow, and extended his left index finger quietly. Lines of phosphorescence ran in his forehead and left hand.

「—What're you doing, Dimitar-san?」

「...I'm reconstructing the magic crests」

Wrinkling his brow slightly, Dimitar drew magic crests on his right hand.

Jagieruka's magic crests that were erased from the fight in Seriba were personally drawn by Dimitar, and although they were mostly restored by Quique, they couldn't be considered complete yet. Thus, magic crests were additionally applied onto Dimitar's right hand to compensate that.

「He—...Hiera Glaphicos can also do such a thing」

「If a large wound which can disrupt the magic crest remains on the skin, the line can still be drawn while avoiding it. Even if the efficiency deteriorates only a little, I'll adjust it as much as possible so that a similar magic can be used. ...That's the job of an exclusive Hiera Glaphicos like me」

「But can magic not heal the likes of wounds?」

「Not all magic warriors can use healing magic. Its degree of difficulty is surprisingly steep after all. Besides, it's also possible that the magic crest may fail to employ healing magic」

「...Ah, now that you say it, that's so, isn't it?」

「Leaving that aside, go to sleep now」

It was irritating to be occasionally asked this and that when he wanted to concentrate on his task, thus Dimitar lightly changed the subject.

「Hai?」

「For what purpose did you come here for? What's your current position?」

「Eeto~...I'm Valeria-sama's attendant, or perhaps I should say follower or—」

「That's right. And if necessary, you've to be Her Eminence's guard」

「Even if you tell me that~, I don't think Valeria-sama needs something like a guard?」

「That's if she can wake up instantly. ...Your role is to stay vigilant while she's sleeping without a care. Take a sleep now in preparation for tonight」

「That's fine, but what'll Dimitar-san be doing in the meantime?」

「I'll be doing various stuffs」

「Hai?」

「I said various stuffs」

While feeling slightly annoyed again, Dimitar pull his rolled up sleeve back into place and sighed.



Valeria, who was ignorant of various things and worldly affairs, couldn't grasp how great and how hectic the official position of this country's deputy prime minister was, but Dante who was accompanying her party and strolling through Buruan for some time went to the royal palace for government matters before their meal.

Owing to this, today's dinner progressed rather quietly and indifferently compared to yesterday's party with the absence of the family head. It was too quiet for Valeria instead. It was so quiet to the point where she felt uncomfortable.

Speaking of manners, it was proper to converse without being coarse when normally dining together like this. Although it was proper to do so, nobody talked. Dante who'd moderately bring up topics and soften the atmosphere was absent, and Karin who was originally taciturn was subdued. Although Petra would reply if she was addressed to, she'd look absentminded for some reason, and yet

her hands handling the cutlery didn't stop. Valeria knew from the start of this trip, but it was unbelievable that Petra somehow ate a lot from her slender physique.

A lively yet boisterous conversation might have taken place if Bettina was here too, but the girl-attendant wasn't present. In that case, the only remaining person was Dimitar who was more indifferent than Karin and had a wicked tongue.

「.....」

Valeria looked at Dimitar while cutting the sauté of a duck with her knife.

As expected, even Dimitar wouldn't disparage Valeria in front of the mansion's maids, but it was still inconceivable that he'd abruptly strike up a conversation with Valeria in a friendly manner. Moreover, it was somehow infuriating for Valeria to call out to Dimitar to perceive her distress.

Valeria became tired from chatting as expected, and when she brought the fork to her mouth, silence descended suddenly. That was natural as she was the only person talking since the start.

If she thought about it, why did she, who wasn't even the host, have to take such things into consideration? With only her abiding by the manners, were the rest not simply lacking etiquette—?

Her indignation grew stronger whilst chewing. With a “girori”, Valeria glared at Dimitar with a sidelong glance while suppressing her feeling of wanting to spasmodically throw away the fork.

「—Costacurta-geika」

「Hau, haii!？」

As Dimitar had spoken up just when she was thinking of “you say something too”, Valeria became a little flustered.

Dimitar ate the roasted beef garnished with mustard stylishly and silently, and said so without looking towards Valeria.

「I'm pleased to see that you seemed to have fully enjoyed the streets of Buruan」

「Eh...? Ah, un, I guess so」

「I'm sure that you've information to share」

「Information? Ah...n—, that's not it, I think? In the end, we only went shopping」

Valeria recalled that the purpose for coming to Buruan was because of a mission, and she replied honestly while feeling a bit embarrassed.

Dimitar who had heard that nodded with an expression that was different from sneering at her or being angry at her. It was a somehow frightfully satisfied and seemingly wanting-to-say-something countenance. After tilting his wine glass with margin to spare, he said

「...Well well」

and gave a vague reply that could be taken with any kind of meaning and became silent again.

Eventually, the meal finished as it was.

「—What was that!?!」

Valeria who had returned to her room declined the maids' assistance to change her clothes, tore off her favourite dress and cursed.

Although Dimitar frustrated her each time, she was also furious at Karin and Petra who completely didn't participate in the conversation.

Nay, Petra was, give and take, fine. Petra who was the lady that went “poya~” at that street originally had few points of contact with

Valeria, and hadn't make her feel especially uncomfortable so far.

But Karin was a separate matter.

Karin had many mannerisms of being level, calm and speaking forthrightly, and also a sense of rivalry from the start. She'd repeatedly and lightly—after apologising first with an “I'm sorry”—speak sarcastically of Valeria. For example,「You're certainly a genius; a genius instinct-wise」or「You've been training magic only, so you aren't free to study common sense very much」or the likes.

It was because Valeria now knew what kind of girl Karin was, that it turned to a point where she was saying “hai hai”, but each of Karin's past remarks used to raise Valeria's blood pressure.

「Kono! Konokonokonokono! Teitei—teah!」

Valeria jumped onto the bed with a “bofun” in her undergarments, turned towards the soft pillow and struck it repeatedly with both her fists.

「You're one to talk! Not having etiquette or something! And yet mocking me at every opportunity! This's irritating!」

Valeria amused herself by practising hooks for some time until the pillow's contents ended up extremely to one side, expelled the faintly remaining anger with a deep breath, and lay down with a “gorun”.

「.....」

Looking up at the exaggerated canopy, Valeria reflected back on the words that Dimitar had spoken just now.

Was that perhaps sarcasm towards her who had strolled in the streets of Buruan with Dante as the guide? If that was the case, why did Dimitar have to speak of such sarcasm? If it was for enjoying the stroll despite being in the middle of a mission, then Karin and Petra should be equally guilty, and yet why did Dimitar said such things to Valeria only?

「It can't be—」

Hugging the pillow with a “gyu!”, Valeria knitted her eyebrows.

「I don't think this's the case but...perhaps that man held a grudge for being left out—ah, that can't be, can it?」

Dimitar had courteously declined it when he was invited by Dante before the trip, then bowed and said “I'll leave Her Eminences in your care.” It was Dimitar's own volition to remain in the mansion, so it was impossible for him to bear a grudge.

Besides, Dimitar would have conveyed it more directly instead of such roundabout method if he was truly angry at Valeria. However, the Dimitar of that time wasn't particularly angry.

If so, what was Dimitar's real intention exactly—?

「—」

While pondering on such matters, Valeria suddenly felt absurd.

Why did she have to concern herself with thoughts of this and that regarding the likes of Dimitar? It was almost the same as asking why she had to pile up great efforts onto herself; a meaningless thing to Valeria.

Valeria released the pillow and shut her eyes. In light of the occasion, she had drunk several cups of wine while saying “Delicious, delicious”, and even now, she felt that her head was spinning from it.

While feeling slightly inebriated, Valeria lay down and closed her eyes for just a short time.

When she opened her eyes from feeling chilly, the mansion was enveloped in stillness. The candlestick that she lit had already disappeared, leaving only the wick, and the time seemed to be midnight already.

「U—...did someone use a magic to advance time quickly?」

Valeria who was slightly naked put on a gown above her undergarments and descended from the bed.

「...?」

Retrieving a bottle of brandy from the cabinet, Valeria gulped down a half-filled glass in one go and felt her body warmed up. She felt that there were some sounds from the garden and approached the window with bated breath.

She pulled the thick curtain aside and looked at the garden through the glass. As the sky was cloudy, the garden was enshrouded softly in darkness without any moonlight. Valeria who had just woken up some time ago couldn't detect anything moving within that darkness with her eyes.

「.....」

After a slight deliberation, Valeria re-tightened the strap which was fastened firmly over her chest and left the room quietly.

If Valeria didn't mistakenly hear the noise from just now, then Dimitar might also have noticed it even if he was sound asleep. It was truly annoying to admit, but that man was especially sharp in this kind of area.

「...Hey」

Knocking on Dimitar's room, Valeria called out reservedly.

「Hey, I need a moment with you」

She tried knocking for a couple of times but there wasn't a response. Even if the noise from just now was her imagination, she didn't think Dimitar wouldn't notice it despite her knocking like this. In other words, it was likely that he knew Valeria was knocking and was ignoring her.

「I know you're awake!」

Kicking the door lightly with a “klunk”, Valeria returned to her room angrily. If Dimitar was feigning sleep like that, then the noise which she heard previously might have been the wind or something as expected, and wasn't anything suspicious in particular.

「...Valeria-samaa?」

「Hia!?!」

As Valeria was about to return to her room, she was surprised by a pink armour that had suddenly appeared from the door of the opposite room and screamed in disarray.

「What's wrong? At such a time...?」

「I, it's nothing—still, shouldn't it be time for you to sleep too, that...?」

「Dimi-san said that this's (*Bachururus*) a military secret, so I've to manage it strictly...」

The voice of Bettina who answered so seemed awfully sleepy.

「It's that sort of thing...? W, well whatever—then, good night」

「Fuai...furuu (*yawning*)!?!」

Striking herself on the visor with a “klunk”, Bettina—probably trying to rub her eyes—retired into her room with an unsteady gait.

「...Good grief」

Returning to her room, Valeria stifled a big yawn and entered the bed again. In the pale dimness, she gazed at the canopy and thought quietly.

She accepted Dante's suggestion and enjoyed her shopping today, but to the end, she had come here for a mission. Since she had finally

secured a place that could become her base, she must give her utmost effort and begin investigating from tomorrow onward.

But then again, Valeria couldn't guess where to begin from and how to investigate. In any case, a considerable number of people were residing in just the streets of Buruan alone. Even if Nereida Kirugiakos was hiding among them, it might become an extremely arduous task to locate her.

First of all, she had to talk to everybody from that vicinity tomorrow.

After thinking about this and that of such a thing, sleepiness assailed her once more.

Valeria pulled the warm blanket up till her chin and closed her eyes softly.



After midnight, Dimitar slipped out from his bed quietly. He had already woken up quite some time ago and was simply waiting for the chance to begin moving, thus there wasn't a delay.

Hanging Jagieruka by his waist, he went out to the garden from his window. Although Dimitar executed covert actions that took advantage of the dark night, what he felt most apprehensive about was in fact, going in and out of this mansion. At any rate, all of the security personnel including that aggressive Salomon were on duty here. It'd likely become a troublesome matter in various ways if he was spotted by those guys.

「...?」

However, as if to ridicule Dimitar's apprehension, the mansion's security was unexpectedly inadequate. It was evidently short of personnel in regards to the scope of the land. Without enlisting the help of magic and getting discovered by anybody, Dimitar scaled over the high wall easily, and after looking back at the mansion briefly,

drew out Jagieruka.

When Dimitar swung the tip of the sword, the magic crests engraved onto its blade began to release phosphorous light. Invoking the “Double Power (*Furigana: Force*)” magic crest, Dimitar’s physical ability rose dramatically. Sheathing his sword back into its scabbard, Dimitar started running in the dark at a speed equivalent to riding a horse.

Arriving at Buruan’s town areas in a flash, Dimitar clung onto the rooftop of a windmill that was built on the town’s outskirts and with a “fu—!”, took a deep breath.

「Speaking of anti-climax, this’s anti-climactic...」

Buruan which was located above a gentle hill had one flaw, and that was water couldn’t be secured if a windmill wasn’t use to draw it. The windmills’ spires that dotted the town’s circumference were high and didn’t have people living in them, thus they could be said to be the ideal hiding places.

When Dimitar had rolled up his left sleeve and exposed the magic crests, he waved his fingertip lightly to create a small flame. Relying on that red and faint illumination, he took out a map from his breast pocket and checked it. Although he had requested Lucius to prepare Buruan’s map on the day before departure, it wasn’t something one could obtain. It was secretly drawn up by Amaddo’s army, and locations of the royal palace and military installations were written down elaborately.

Dimitar revised the map under the light, crammed most of it into his head and stood up.

However, at the moment when he bent both legs to jump off from the windmill’s spire, Dimitar grasped Jagieruka by its hilt with his left hand and unsheathed it in a backhand grip.

「!」

Looking back over his shoulder, a petite silhouette that was enveloped in an unseasonal gale and dancing in the empty space appeared before Dimitar's vision.

「...Cease trying to cut suddenly」

Karin who wore a black mantle swooped down while speaking in a low voice. She was dressed in her Dominas garb that revealed her solar plexus to her navel beneath the mantle. The radiance of her bluish white magic crest remained on her slender and well-proportioned right thigh that had extended out from the short pants.

Dimitar released his hand from Jagieruka's hilt and asked her after surveying the surrounding.

「...Why're you here, Rudbeck-geika?」

「Isn't it troublesome to talk while minding every detail? You don't take on such disposition towards that girl, right?」

It seemed that Karin had heard of Dimitar's insolence from Valeria. Rather than troublesome, it'd be extremely helpful to Dimitar if he could do away with formal speech.

「I use it with a different meaning」

Dimitar shrugged his shoulders lightly and murmured brusquely.

「...That girl's magic skills aren't inferior, but being ignorant of the ways of the world makes her discernment bad. Even though I brought up a topic just now, she totally gave a wrong reply」

「I believe that was Richternach-kyou's fault. If you knew Valeria's discernment is bad, shouldn't you have ask her a bit more clearly?」

「I couldn't ask if she had done a reconnaissance of the town in the presence of the mansion's maids. ...From that look, she seemed to have really enjoyed her shopping, and repeatedly rebuking her for that is troublesome. Time is precious. —So, what're you doing for you

to be here? You aren't chasing after me, are you?」

「I'm not chasing after you in particular, but we're probably trying to do the same thing」

「Unlike Her Eminence from my side, I presume you did a proper reconnaissance?」

「It isn't anything like a reconnaissance since it isn't my first time coming to this town」

「That's true」

If Karin knew this town well, then she was much more reliable than Valeria. It wasn't like they specifically arranged to act together, but when Dimitar jumped down from the windmill's spire; Karin followed Dimitar and landed gently as if it was a matter of course.

The diminutive starlight made the plastered walls of the aligned buildings stand out dimly in white and cast faint shadows of the pair, who were walking while killing the sounds of their footsteps, onto them.

「...Which place do you think is suspicious?」

With the mantle's hood pulled over to conceal her face, Karin asked Dimitar.

「If limited to this town, then the army's facilities are the top priorities for investigation. First will be the armoury, followed by the workshop. If the actual article is somehow there, then the likelihood of Nereida assisting this country's army becomes fairly high. ...Of course, unless the person herself is caught, we can't prove that Biranoba is involved in the recent rebellion」

「I can't imagine Biranoba's government doing such a thing. To begin with, if Amaddo weakens, national defence will become a cause for great uneasiness even to Biranoba」

「It'll also become a pretext for Biranoba to be independent and strengthen its military force」

「...You don't believe that human nature is fundamentally good?」

「That's not it. In reality, there are also unexpected good-natured people in this world. ...But if you're to presume such a thing that has no guarantee, then Amaddo will experience the same thing as Biranoba this time」

「So you're a realist」

「I live realistically after all」

While replying so, Dimitar expanded the map inside his mind again. If they headed north as it was just a bit more, they'd reach the town's best plaza that became a marketplace every morning. Thence, if they went three sections north, turned east and advanced for a while, they should arrive at the boundary where the Biranoba army's parade square and armoury converged.

「—You mustn't use magic」

「I know」

In the darkness of the night, it was conspicuous to produce phosphorescence from pouring magic power into the magic crests. Besides, if it was a suspicious person who used magic in Buruan—moreover a young woman—then Karin and party were likely to be suspected in the foremost. In any case, there wasn't a woman in this town who could currently use magic practically like them from the onset.

At the end of the considerably wide eastern road, the armoury which was surrounded by high walls could be seen. Sentinels were patrolling the circumference, and sounds of their military boots resounded, as if to intimidate any suspicious person who approached there.

「...May I?」

Dimitar lowered his voice and looked down towards Karin.

「I don't really understand, but all right」

「Is that so?」

Dimitar suddenly carried the waist of Karin who was even lighter than Valeria over his shoulder, and jumped onto the roof of a private house.

「...I've the impression that you're accustomed to this」

「That's no helping it. ...I also don't want to think of carrying a Dominas and running around as a Hiera Glaphicos's main duty」

Dimitar replied in a murmur to Karin who was restraining herself from laughing and began to run.

Even though he was made to do the same thing in Seriba, what differed from that time was that people, who were oblivious to everything, were sleeping normally underneath the roofs. If he trod through the roofs carelessly and caused a tumult at once, the armoury's security would tighten immediately.

However, Dimitar wasn't tense. He calmly ran in the night, leaped over a street and using the high wall as a foothold, descended onto the armoury's roof in one breath.

「...This's convenient」

Karin who was hiding alongside Dimitar on the roof murmured.

「What's convenient?」

「...Is it unreasonable to request the same thing from Petra?」

「In exchange, your affinity seems good. ...Ours is the worst」

「You knew that and yet you don't intend to improve it」

「You should say that to Her Eminence instead of me. She's envious of my good relationship with Lucius」

「Speaking of that child, that seems just like her」

「...Whatever」

Dimitar removed an unglazed roof tile. However, beneath the tile was a densely affixed iron plate. It might have been a counter-measure for fire prevention rather than crime prevention. It seemed difficult to strip this off without making a sound and enter inside.

Karin bent forward over the edge of the roof and affirmed the sentinels' positions, then returned and said.

「...What shall we do now?」

「I don't intend to break in forcibly」

If it became known that a trespasser had broken into an army's facility, the entire Buruan would instantly be in high alert. Taking their future activities into consideration, he wanted to avoid that scenario.

Dimitar retrieved a small porcelain bottle from his breast pocket.

「...What's that?」

「Sleeping drug. ...What about the sentries?」

「Two of them. I think there are other guards patrolling though」

「We'll put them to sleep simultaneously, open the lock and sneak in at that time. We've to make sure they didn't realise that someone had trespassed inside」

「...Is that possible?」

「If you manipulate the wind skilfully, you can put those two to sleep immediately」

Dimitar handed the bottle over to Karin.

「...The content will vaporise immediately once you uncorked the bottle. Please drift it towards their locations skilfully and don't inhale it no matter what, okay?」

「Yes」

Karin quietly stopped her breathing and uncorked the small bottle.

The sleeping drug prepared by Dimitar was made by blending an ingredient that Quique had extracted from a mandrake's root and alcohol, and its effectiveness was guaranteed. However, it was relatively lighter than air and would literally vanish like mist if left alone.

Karin grasped the bottle with her left hand and held her right hand aloft beside it. The phosphorescence of her bluish-white magic crest on the back of her right hand lit up faintly, and a gentle breeze began to blow.

「—」

The wind summoned by Karin carried the sleeping drug, and was slowly blown down towards the ground from the roof. Perhaps the guards keeping watch below would only think of it as the wind's direction changing slightly.

Dozens of seconds after the unnatural wind had begun to blow, the soldiers guarding the entrance dropped their spears and collapsed on the spot.

「Let's finish this before the soldiers on patrol come」

Dimitar said so to Karin and jumped down from the roof while carrying her under his arm.

「...The key」

Upon descending onto the ground, Karin examined the waists of the soldiers and tossed the key that she had found to Dimitar.

「If it's a lock of this level, I can open it without the key」

「...You can open it?」

「I've actually prepared tools in consideration of the possibility where I'm unable to get the key」

「...Even though you seem experienced in this, you don't commit burglary, right?」

「That rude reaction is similar to Her Eminence's, you know? You ought to be a little ashamed」

Raising his lips to a grin, Dimitar removed the lock and grasped the iron door's handle.

With its weight approximately that of a mass of iron, the sliding-type door would normally have to be opened by two adult men, but if it was the current Dimitar who had slightly become a superhuman, it wasn't a difficult procedure.

「...What's that smell?」

The air that had escaped when the door was opened caused Karin to grimace.

「It's the smell of stale oil. It's used to prevent the swords and armours from rusting. Light」

Karin immediately created a magic flame. Inside the armoury that was illuminated by the soft light were countless armaments aligned orderly. In this vast space that could hold a little party, the armours and shields that lined up side-by-side while reflecting the redness of the flame was a spectacle itself, yet it also seemed detached from the

vividness of a real battlefield somehow.

「It's fine to say that they're neatly arranged but...there's hardly any trace of them being used in reality」

「Should that not be the case? As far as I know, even if you trace back until a hundred years in the past, Biranoba shouldn't have mobilised its army once」

「Even if that's so, a proper army would still practise periodically」

Dimitar knocked on the surfaces of the shields that were piled up orderly with his finger and laughed.

「These are completely unused...is Biranoba's government temporarily satisfied of its current status quo to live cosily under the umbrella that are Amaddo and Diruma?」

「If that's true, then this's strange. Didn't we come here because the possibility of Biranoba employing that woman called Nereida to expand its magic war potential exists? And yet there's no sign of military expansion in Biranoba?」

「What those guys are planning are of no concern. What we've to search for are armaments or tools made via magic engineering. —Ma, there's nothing that seems to be it here though」

An armament made by magic engineering—likewise, Dimitar's Jagieruka for example—had magic crests carved onto its surface. However, all the armours and shields that were stored here only had simple and sturdy designs that prioritised practicability; not to mention magic crest, even useless ornaments weren't added.

Karin opened the lid of a long chest and checked its contents, then spoke to Dimitar in a fed up manner.

「...The spears here are also normal ones. —What shall we do? Do we turn over all the chests here and search?」

「Iya, that may not be necessary. —There's none here. Let's go」

Once he left the armoury quickly, Dimitar closed the door and put on the lock again.

「Please disperse the air around here a little. I don't want the smell of oil to reveal the fact that the armoury was opened」

「Yes」

Karin once again manipulated the wind to mix the air which smelled of oil into the night air and dispersed it. In the meantime, Dimitar returned the key that they had used to the waist of the sentry who was sleeping soundly. Once the sentries woke up after a while, they'd probably thought that they had merely dozed off.

「—Next is the workshop」

Dimitar held Karin under his arm and leaped onto the armoury's roof. Similar to the time when he intruded, he used the wall as a foothold and escaped.

Beyond this point was the parade square, and the army's workshop was located at its corner. However, the army's lodging house and stable were built nearby, thus the intrusion required more caution.

「...Dominas」

Karin leaked out a sigh while Dimitar ran at full speed along the wall.

「Do they keep on doing this kind of work, I wonder?」

「It may vary from country to country. ...For example, during her term of office of nine years, Bito's Dominas seems to live a life that's nearly no different from house arrest in the royal palace. Needless to say, her treatment seems to be the same as royalty」

When Dimitar left the Seal Chivalric Order and switched to the

path of a Hiera Glaphicos, he was made to study diligently under Orvieto. Hence, he was well-informed to some extent, of the various countries' situations which couldn't be heard normally.

「—Even if she has an outstanding ability as a magic warrior, when thinking of worst case scenarios, she wouldn't be sent off on a dangerous mission. Bito isn't blessed with magic warriors; if it becomes a situation where they carelessly lose a Dominas who was in her tenure and couldn't appoint a substitute, they might protest when His Majesty elects another Dominas from Amaddo to make up for it」

「If that's the case, then Amaddo is strange. ...If I'm not mistaken, there doesn't seem to be another country that has such strict competition to become a Dominas」

Karin gave a lonesome smile.

「There might be just that many people who possess magic ability in Amaddo. Anyway, Amaddo's Dominas isn't simply a figurehead. Besides holding the post of an inspector concurrently, she's a capable piece that receives imperial command and moves accordingly if something happened. ...Do you dislike that?」

「 I think it's worthwhile, ...but now」

「That's a rather roundabout way of saying it」

「In any case, I can't say that I'll stop now because I dislike it, right? Even I'm the same as Valeria. I became a Dominas to rebuild my house, you know?」

「There's no need for her to rebuild the house by herself, right? Her father is wealthy」

「It's because the relationship with that father isn't good that she wants to do it by herself one way or another」

「Her circumstances aren't what I know of. ...Ma, I think it's still early for her to be saying self-important things—」

Dimitar suddenly stopped his feet.

The sound of footsteps approached from a nearby corner. It numbered one, but was fairly close. Dimitar quickly surveyed around the vicinity. When he immediately confirmed that there was no place to hide, he gently kept Karin's head down, bent his body and leaped in one bound.

「!?」

「What'll you do? Weren't you seen?」

The soldier who had turned around the corner began to reach for the whistle hanging from his neck, but he fainted from a hit before he could blow it.

「...Yare yare」

Dimitar stroked his right hand that had struck the soldier's medulla oblongata and crouched down.

「It'll be fine. I'll do something since you weren't seen. A night burglar that's accompanied by a woman is somewhat unnatural after all」

While saying so, Dimitar searched the chest and pockets of the unconscious soldier. He took most of the things in his wallet and valuables to pass it off as the deed of a robber.

「...Besides having a job that doesn't seem good and pays little, he was hit and fainted; to make matter worse, all his money on hand was taken. He's really an unlucky man」

「Do you really have no personal history of being a theft or a robber?」

Karin said to Dimitar with a soft smile spread across her cold look.

「I won't deny that there are various unfavourable rumours of me,

but at the very least, most of them are baseless nonsense spread by nobles who hold ill will towards me. If I've the time to steal sneakily, it's better to do my work normally and succeed in life」

「...You're unexpectedly diligent」

「I told you that I live realistically, right? ...Let's go」

Dimitar ended his talk with Karin and started walking.

If it was someone like Valeria, she'd pounced on that and seized the initiative after he involuntarily let out that verbal slip. But Karin wouldn't speak thoughtlessly, and above all, since she was intelligent, it was difficult to assume leadership even if they acted together.

Naturally, Dimitar should be in a position where he must obey Karin since she was above him in status and age. But somehow, in addition to Karin overlooking such a thing entirely, she seemed to let Dimitar do as he liked.

It was uncomfortable somehow. He was sure that he had acted on his own initiative, and yet he felt that he was skilfully twisted around her little finger.

Thus—Dimitar suddenly thought so. Was Valeria's personality which was the type that was easy to lead around by the nose in fact not an unexpected good fortune for him?

Chapter 04 - You Must Never Get Involved

The **Seal Chivalric Order**, which was composed of Amaddo's young nobles, was said to be founded after the establishment of Amaddo's royal family to extol the merits of the twelve magic warriors who had exhausted themselves with “**Lord of Redemption (*Furigana: Redountra*)**” to seal “**Demon (*Furigana: Maroudo*)**” during the mythical age.

The current **Seal Chivalric Order** consisted of eighty-nine people to commemorate the number of warriors who had survived the battle against “**Demon**”. As a combat squad that had once fought against the “**Demon**”, the dual advantage of using both magic and sword was demanded of its members. However, after it became a type of honorary position, an enormous donation was needed to enrol instead; in fact, it became the enrolment's condition for high-ranking nobles' children.



Incidentally, the **Seal Chivalric Order** had never stood in a real battlefield once during these one hundred years.

A knock would normally sound a little gentler, but the knock of this time was extremely harsh and noisy.

「.....」

Opening her eyes slowly, Valeria grimaced from a dull throbbing pain that ran through her temple, clicked her tongue and got up.

The light shining in from the gap of the curtain was dazzling, and her lengthened shadow indicated that it was still early in the morning.

However, this rude knock wasn't from a maid-san that had come to wake Valeria up.

「Valeria-sama, Valeria-sama!」

She could roughly hear the low and restrained voice of Bettina together with the boisterous knocking that continued even now. It seemed as if that armoured girl didn't realise that it was completely meaningless to lower only her voice.

Valeria furrowed her brow even deeper from that sound which pounded in her head and went towards the door.

「Hold on...you're being noisy...」

「Ah! You've finally woken up desune, Valeria-samaa!」

When Valeria undid the lock, a pink body intruded inside with a tumbling momentum.

「...Why in the world did you wake me up on such an early morning...?」

「T, this's terrible desuyou, Valeria-sama!」

「So, what's it...?」

Bettina hurried to the window while dragging along noisy footsteps with a “gacho gacho”. When she had turned over the curtain and checked the garden, she returned to Valeria who had drunk some water from the pitcher and was seating on the bed.

「I, I actually saw this a while ago desuyou!」

「Saw what...?」

「Though I stayed up all night, I unintentionally dozed off at dawn」

「Ha? Why did you stay up all night?」

「I'll explain that again afterwards. A, anyway, some noise came from the garden after I dozed off desu! Thereupon, I woke up and wondered what it was. And when I flipped the curtain to look, they were there desu!」

「What was there?」

「Dimitar-san and Karin-sama desuyou!」

「...Eh?」

Valeria, who was tired and had placed her hand on her forehead, raised her face at Bettina's words.

「Di...Richternach-kyou and Karin? Eh? Where were they?」

「In the garden over there desuyou!」

「Why were the two of them—?」

「I didn't hear properly, but the two of them were nestled close together and somehow talking secretly under a tree as if they were wary of the surrounding. They seemed to have returned to their respective rooms afterwards, and I thought of hurrying to notify Valeria-sama—」

「Just a minute...!?!」

Her slightly remaining sleepiness was completely blown away.

If she was to believe Bettina, then Dimitar and Karin had avoided public gaze and met clandestinely. She didn't think that Karin, who fully understood her own position and was also very prudent, would ever do such a careless thing. But at the same time, Valeria was bothered by the remark of Karin who didn't feel that Dimitar was detestable.

In reality, when she thought of what the pair were secretly doing and talking about in the garden at dawn, the brain of Valeria who

had just woken up boiled with a “gura gura”. She wasn’t sure what to say and how to explain it, but she was angry somehow or the other. Although she didn’t know why, she was angry.

Pulling and tearing off her gown, Valeria flung it away and changed her clothes hurriedly. She then flew out of her room while holding the hem of her dress, and lightly kicked the door of Dimitar’s room.

「Richternach-kyou! Open the door quickly! Otherwise I’ll break it!」

「Valeria-sama, p, please calm down! Why did you flare up suddenly~?」

「I’m calm! And I’m not angry!」

When she responded with a menacing look that startled Bettina, the lock opened with a “kachari” sound and Dimitar peeked through the gap of the slightly opened door.

「You’re so noisy...what’s the matter exactly?」

「I’ve something to talk about!」

Right after she said so, Valeria half-forcibly intruded into the room.

「Good grief...」

Dimitar, who was rumpling his dark grey hair while yawning in succession, was actually in a light sleep (*1st stage of sleep*) as he was naked above the waist. Since he was always bustling about while carrying that large sword, his body was supple and balanced. It made her associate him with a sly carnivorous animal like a wolf or fox. And remaining faintly near his slightly visible abs was probably the arrow wound that he had received in Seriba.

Valeria, who was staring at Dimitar’s body absentmindedly for a short time, came to her senses suddenly and shook her head while

shuddering.

「—A, anyway! Put something on first! It, it's rude to a lady!」

「...Aren't you the one who had entered forcibly?」

Dimitar stroked the scruff of his neck and grumbled.

「...So, what's it? Since you've specially come to disturb someone's quiet sleep, I suppose it's quite an emergency?」

「You're being imprudent! Despite doing such a thing...」

While occasionally giving sidelong glances towards Dimitar who was buttoning his shirt, Valeria adjusted her breathing.

「Such a thing? What do you mean?」

「T, that—Bettina! Hora, repeat what you said just now!」

「Eh—? Me?」

「It's fine, so go on!」

「U~」

Bettina reluctantly repeated the contents that she had told Valeria just now.

Hearing that, Dimitar's eyebrows quivered.

「...Oi, you said that you dozed off? I'm sure that I told you to stay vigilant at night」

「Aah, I'm sorry, I'm sorry!」

「You've nothing to apologise for!」

Valeria scolded the pliant armoured girl who was apologising and scowled at Dimitar with a “girori”. This kind of man wasn't

frightening at all as long as he put on a shirt.

「Rather, what's with the “stay vigilant at night” part?」

「You'll need a guard when I aren't around, right? That's why I told her to keep watch at night」

「Then, is it that? You forced the role of being my guard onto Bettina and indulgently go on a yobai yourself?」

「Yobai, you say?」

「Rather than yobai...y, you met with Karin secretly, right!?」

「.....」

When Dimitar, who was sitting on the bed's edge, crossed his long legs and rested his chin on his hand, he released a lengthy sigh, raised his lips and gave a faint smile. It was the half-amazed-like and always mocking people—to say nothing of irritating—type of smile of his.

「Y, you—」

Valeria unconsciously flared up and raised her voice.

「Karin's a Dominas in active duty, you know!? Do you know what'll happen if you get involved with her?! It's obvious that you'll be punished, even Karin—」

「...I've neither gotten involved with her nor intend to do so」

「Don't laugh at each and every thing! Your attitude is terrible!」

「It's because you're saying so ludicrous things」

「Then what's it!? What were you doing with Karin!?」

「Is there a need to tell you?」

「...! —」

Retorted by Dimitar with a “sakuri (*being hit in the bulls-eye*)”, Valeria became speechless.

Needless to say, if Dimitar was indeed trying to make a move on Karin, then Valeria must prevent it since Amaddo's interest and honour would be greatly damaged. However, if that wasn't the case, then Valeria had no right to interfere with what Dimitar and Karin were talking about or doing, even if she was Dimitar's superior.

「I won't act in a way that'll bring trouble to Lucius. Therefore, I'll never do what you're suspecting, and there's no need for you to be edgy. ...If you understand that, then leave quickly. I'm feeling sleepy」

「B, but—!」

「I'm sorry...I could hear you even from the corridor」

Yet when Valeria tried to argue vehemently, Petra who had finished changing her clothes and Karin who was in her gown and still looking sleepy entered the room quietly.

While rubbing her eyes, Karin stepped up to Valeria.

「...I don't know what you're thinking, but you're misunderstanding this」

「Misunderstanding?」

「If I really met a man secretly, I'd have done so in a place that's even more isolated. Do you think it's exciting to be in a place that can be seen immediately if you flip the curtain?」

「U...」

Now that Karin mentioned it, it might be so. She didn't notice it since she lacked the actual experience. Although Bettina was equally guilty, her embarrassment of having made an exaggerated fuss took

precedence.

「T, then, what on earth were the two of you doing?」

「We were wandering around here and there in the town. Starting from the army's armoury, we searched the workshop and even the stable. I was thinking whether we could find evidence of Nereida's existence」

「You went on a search—eh? Last night?」

「Rather than last night, it was few hours ago」

「W, why...」

Once Karin had pointed out her misunderstanding, the voltage of Valeria's subsided anger rose again with a “guru guru”.

「W, why didn't you notify me of such an important matter...also, why did you do it with Karin!?」

「I also said the same thing but~」

Petra pushed up her glasses lightly and muttered in a tone that didn't seem to be angry.

「—I wasn't informed of anything too and was told of the circumstances when I noticed this child coming back just now—.Why did you hide it from me too, I wonder?」

「...I simply ran after Richternach-kyou at once because I noticed the sound of him leaving. I didn't call out to you because I judged that I'd have lost sight of Richternach-kyou during that time」

「That's enough from Karin's side—」

Folding her arms, Valeria glared at Dimitar. Although she knew that it was impossible for this young man to become flustered from just a small cross-examination, she wouldn't feel satisfied unless he apologised.

「—You, w, why didn't you call me!?!」

「I planned to call you. Though I knocked on your room before leaving the mansion, you're probably sound asleep at that time already, right? There wasn't a response」

「No way!?! You knocked? Really?!」

Valeria's complexion changed with a "gikuri" from Dimitar's remark.

She had returned to her room after last night's meal, flopped onto the bed at once and ended up sleeping. The next time when she woke up was already midnight. She felt that she had heard some noise at that time, but thinking back now, that might have been the sound of Karin leaving the mansion. Although she knocked on the door of Dimitar's room immediately afterwards, there wasn't a response. If she thought of it as a sign that he had already left the mansion, then the consistency matched.

Did Dimitar notice the visible change in Valeria's expression? He gave a small snort.

「...Judging from your expression, were you not sound asleep? As expected」

「U...」

「Ma, when you drank to that extent during the meal, I don't think you'll be of any use until you sobered up」

「How rude! Saying that I'm useless—」

「To begin with, you're lacking in self-awareness」

Dimitar spoke coldly in order to muffle the words of the indignant Valeria.

「I'm sure that I asked you this at mealtime; whether you had fun

outside during the day」

「W, what of it?」

「You didn't realise it? That was sarcasm, you know?」

Crossing his legs, Dimitar wiggled his toes with a “pura pura”, and a really wicked-like smile floated on his lips. Valeria was bitterly made to realise this during the mission in Seriba, but when Dimitar made such an expression, he'd thoroughly defeat her with logic and reason.

「—If you've even a little bit of self-awareness, you'd have survey the state of the town while you were out or memorise the map, and even though there were things you ought to do, the first thing you did when you came back to the mansion was to make me and Gacha Pink carry your belongings? Indeed, you certainly seemed to have shopped enjoyably. ...In short, that's the extent of your resolution to this mission」



「...!」

「Why'd I take you, who didn't investigate for the mission, and to make matter worse, got carelessly intoxicated from drinking so much wine, along on a secret espionage activity? You'd likely only be a hindrance. ...Maa, I originally didn't plan to take you along, but to have no self-awareness even here is rather uninspiring」

「But...t, then, why was Karin—」

「...It's because I didn't drink as much as you did in the first place」

Standing shrewdly before the full-length mirror and arranging her dishevelled hair, Karin looked at Valeria from across the mirror.

「Besides, saying that I wanted to shop and sending the carriage to various shops was to affirm with my own eyes, how much the town which I'm visiting after several years has changed, and also the changes that can't be known just from reading a map, so that I won't be troubled when the time to move comes」

「Y...you were thinking of such thing while shopping, Karin!？」

「Yes」

「A person who has self-awareness like her is useful. ...This way of speaking is rude to Rudbeck-geika. Anyway, do you understand why I didn't wake you up with this? It's because it's a waste of time」

「—」

As expected, he didn't go easy on her. She was undeniably defeated thoroughly and had no words to retort. Yesterday, Valeria thought that she had unconsciously gotten carried away and enjoyed herself too much, hence she thought of doing her best from tomorrow for sure.

However, that thought was too naive. Despite being in the midst of a mission which might influence her country's interest, the thought of

doing her best from tomorrow was her ineptitude as a person chosen for this mission.

Dimitar discontinued the matter regarding Valeria, whose face was flushed from the anger towards him and above all, the anger towards herself, and spoke to Karin.

「...Just nice. Let's discuss what lies ahead now」

「Very well. It has been three days already since we came to Biranoba, and our evaluations will also be affected if we don't produce some conclusive results soon」

「...Even if you said conclusive results, did you discover something?」

When Valeria had finally said that much, Dimitar looked at her fleetingly and nodded.

「I've discovered that the army facilities of this town didn't store weapons and armours that seemed like it (*product of magic engineering*), and have no trace of Nereida either. It wasn't a detailed search but, maa, nothing might turned up even if we searched the royal palace's treasury」

「Then where's she hiding?」

「This's my intuition but—this case is unrelated to Biranoba's government」

「Eh?」

「This country has no intention of expanding its military force at all. The soldiers' discipline is lax, and even the armours' maintenance is perfunctory. It's by no means a state where they can separate from Amaddo and protect the country with their own strength. In addition, its military budget isn't especially large too. ...At least, I don't think that the military authorities are involved based on these implications」

「Then what's it? A matter that's contrary to our expectations even

though we came to Biranoba?」

「That might not be the case. It's a fact that Nereida mailed a letter to Chief Engineer from this country」

「But we haven't find a clue on where she's now, and there's no proof of her making something, right?」

「...If you exclude the possibility that's the army authorities, then there's one place that I feel is suspicious」

Saying so, Dimitar glanced at the back figure of Karin.

「...What's it, Richternach-kyou?」

「Does the Valiente House has at least one or two other detached residences?」

「Yes. Though it has villas in Amaddo and Diruma, there's also one nearby」

「Ah...if it's that place, then I'm sure it's about an hour by carriage from here~」

Petra supplemented Karin's reply. Dimitar then nodded with a self-satisfied look and continued in a low voice.

「Please teach me of that place in detail」

「Wait a minute」

Valeria knitted her eyebrows and stared at Dimitar.

「That way of saying...eh? Surely you aren't suspecting Dante-san, are you? I mean—isn't he Karin's relative and also the next prime minister of this country?」

「If the army isn't the mastermind, then what we ought to suspect next is an influential person within the country. Since a large-scale research can't be advanced secretly unless it's someone with money

and power」

「But...」

It wasn't as if she didn't understand what Dimitar had said. However, while it was justifiable, she didn't feel good suspecting Dante at the start. Dante wasn't the only influential person of this country, and wasn't it all right to do so after checking the many other possibilities? First, to suspect Dante meant suspecting Karin's relative and childhood friend.

However, it was unexpected that Karin whom Valeria was glancing at didn't appear offended—it was her usual stance nonetheless—and was indifferently facing herself in the full-length mirror.

「Hey, Karin! Shouldn't you say something? Your childhood friend is under suspicion, you know?」

「...If I were to separate myself from a relative's standpoint and think of the possibility only, then if it's surely Dante, he's liable to do it」

「Eh!？」

「Like I said, he's likely to do such things secretly if it's him」

「Is...that so?」

「He isn't a bad person at the core, but perhaps I should say that he's an excessive strong patriotic person with just a little prejudice... since the past, he'd say things like being responsible for this country someday, and changing this country that's similar to a vassal state of Amaddo and Diruma. His pride is also very high」

「But to suspect him from just that...there's plenty of people with strong patriotism, right?」

「I don't know that man well but」

Dimitar interrupted the conversation between Valeria and Karin.

「—The first time I felt that man was suspicious was when we arrived at this mansion. At that time, do you remember what that man said when he saw Gacha Pink?」

「Eh? Um...」

「I was bothered by that too」

Separating from the front of the full-length mirror, Karin replied instead of the speechless Valeria.

「...If I remember correctly, Dante at that time said something like he was envious that magic engineering is progressing in Amaddo」

「What about it?」

「...You knew the word “magic engineering”?」

「Eh? That’s maa, I heard it when I met the Chief Engineer some time ago」

「I didn’t know it until I participated in this mission. Petra too, right?」

「Un」

「I, I knew of it!」

Bettina, who didn’t have the chance to interject the whole time until now, raised her right hand with a “gachuin” and spoke up.

「I also knew of it since earlier on」

「Isn’t that because you guys go in and out of the Chief Engineer’s workshop all this time—I don’t want to be shown off to by such a thing!」

「I don’t intend to show off in particular. ...The point is, it isn’t a

word that should be known unless you're such a person (*a workshop's patron*)」

Dimitar said so while looking coldly towards Valeria who had spontaneously raised her voice.

「If one is to go in and out of a workshop, it's natural that he'll be familiar with the word “magic engineering”, but on the contrary, it's an unfamiliar word to people who don't go in and out of there. In the first place, it's a neologism that the Chief Engineer applied to his research. Even in Amaddo's royal palace, there's hardly anybody who know of such a word. —In that case, where exactly did Dante learn of the word “magic engineering”? Can a completely unrelated person to such research deduce that Bachu is an armour which was somehow made via magic engineering from just a glance?」

「Ah...」

If she considered that the word was transmitted to Dante from Nereida who had researched with Quique, then the explanation made sense. Rather, there was no choice but to think so.

「I'm not sure the contact came from whom, but there must be a connection somehow between Dante and Nereida. I believe there's hardly a doubt of that」

「If that's case—」

Valeria looked around the room. Perhaps the sword and gauntlet which were heavily inscribed with magic crests were hidden somewhere within this mansion.

「—The actual article may not be here」

As if he had seen through Valeria's thoughts, Dimitar continued.

「I tried to roughly search the mansion during the day yesterday, but there doesn't seem to be a place for keeping such a thing. It'd have been understandable if it's a set of decorated armour, but as far

as a large quantity is concerned, it's not hard to narrow down the storage area」

「What about the detached cabin where the gardener lives and the stable?」

「They aren't inconceivable as possibilities..., but letting us stay like this and yet not restricting our movement in particular, I feel that it may be possible that the actual article isn't here. Even if it is, it may be imperceptible」

「...If it exists, it may be in the detached residence」

「Ah—, if I'm not mistaken, I heard that the mansion was built especially for Dante's Oba-sama to recuperate from her illness. Therefore, it's seldom use now」

If it was a vast mansion that was far away from town and in addition, where guests weren't invited to, then it certainly might be an ideal place for a person to hide in and continue researching. It seemed suspicious just from hearing about it.

However, Valeria still didn't feel fully satisfied somehow.

More accurately speaking, it wasn't the matter of suspecting Dante that she was unsatisfied with. What she wasn't satisfied with, was that the talk was progressing under the initiative of Dimitar and Karin with it (*Dante's possible involvement*) as a prerequisite. She couldn't help feeling as if she was excluded.

In fact, Dimitar and Karin had decided their future plans by just the two of them before Valeria could interject.

「—Then it's decided with this」

「That's right」

「Now that's it has been settled, everyone please leave. As expected, I can't move tonight if I don't sleep a little」

「...Yes. I'll also take a rest」

Karin hid a small yawn with her hand and left the room with Petra.

「...You included」

「Huh?」

「I said that I'll be going to sleep soon, right?」

Dimitar began to take off his shirt again while saying so. Seeing his surprisingly white back, Valeria's face turned bright red and she panicky rushed out to the corridor with Bettina.

「Y, you really have no delicacy!」

Valeria, who had cursed towards the door that was closed violently, noticed the gaze of Karin who had taken a step out of her room, and feeling embarrassed, she hurriedly cleared her throat.

Karin stared at Valeria fixedly and spoke deliberately.

「...You, what's the matter?」

「Huh?」

「You seem to have a dissatisfied look since just now」

「T...that's because you guys arbitrarily decided everything!」

「To be specific, we don't have such an intention but...you should have said it if you've an opinion」

「I don't have the chance to do so!」

「Is that so...? I'm sorry about that. Then, will you let me hear your opinion once again?」

「T, that's...」

Even if Karin said to let her hear it again, Valeria didn't have an opinion in particular. When she went “au au” without saying anything else, Karin gazed at Valeria with a sympathising look,

「...You don't have to be pretentious even to me, okay, Valeria? Otherwise, won't you feel suffocated?」

「I, I'm not pretending!」

「Ara, I'm sorry for arbitrarily deciding that」

「Saying I'm sorry I'm sorry...it doesn't mean you can say whatever you like if you apologise like that」

「While I'm at it, I'm sorry for another of my arbitrary assumption」

「W, what? There's still something else?」

Karin approached Valeria with a “zuzui” and looked up at her face from up-close.

「...Isn't it because you're actually jealous that you've been displeased since just now?」

「...!」

When she understood the meaning of Karin's words, Valeria's mind became blank.

It was completely unexpected. What were unexpected weren't Karin's words, but her current attitude that seemed as if she was jealous of something.

That's ridiculous—thinking that made Valeria restless.

「W-w-w, w, what's this, all of a sudden!?」

「I think you felt excluded and became jealous because Richternach-kyou and I worked as a pair a lot. ...Am I wrong?」

「Y, you're wrong!」

Valeria clenched her fists and denied it with all her might.

「I'm certainly offended by his self-justification but...that's all! It's just unpleasant that you guys advanced the discussion as you like!」

「Really?」

「That's right!」

「Then it's fine. I'm sorry for saying weird things」

「Like I said, don't apologise for everything. ...Even though you don't really feel that sorry」

「Sort of」

Laughing coldly with a “fufun”, Karin returned to her room.

When Valeria was seeing her off while adjusting her breathing,

「Err...Valeria-sama?」

「It's not because I'm jealous!」

Valeria turned around and screamed at Bettina who had called out to her timidly.

「...That's Karin's arbitrary assumption! Therefore, you won't take it seriously and say boring things to that guy, right!? If you do so, I'll fire you!」

「I won't tattle to Dimitar-san especially but...what I want to say is desune, if you talk in such a loud voice here, won't everything be overheard? ...Maa, it may be too late even if I said it now though」

「—」

After she stared at her own face which was reflected on the curved

surface of Bettina's smooth helmet briefly, Valeria hurried to her room in a trot.

「—I'm going to sleep already!」

「Eh!? Didn't you just wake up a while ago?」

「I'm going back to sleep!」

Bettina seemed to be saying something beyond the door, but it wasn't audible to Valeria who had dived into the bed and pulled the blanket over her head. She decided not to hear it.

「Uuuuuu....!」

If she calmed down and thought carefully, such a thing should have never happened.

Who was it that she liked—Valeria would unhesitatingly and instantly answer that it was Lucius. What did she thought of Dimitar—she'd declared immediately without hesitation that he was strong, and swearing to Redountra, a gloomy, irritating and unpleasant fellow.

Even if Valeria tried to think over and over again repeatedly, that stance of hers didn't waver.

Nevertheless, Valeria didn't understand it well why it wavered from such things spoken by Karin.

She thought that it was all right not to know what she didn't know, and that it'd have worked out if she skilfully concealed her agitation, but it was regrettable that she had hurriedly denied it in a loud voice. That'd seem like she was hit in the bull's-eye and panicked.

「Gununu...!」

Valeria placed her head on the pillow again and continued her small-scale confinement until close to noon while groaning in a low

voice.

She didn't want to say anything to Bettina and Petra now, and of course, Dimitar and Karin too.



A silhouette of a bird with its wings widely spread was traversing the blue sky slowly.

While a strong breeze with the scent of greenery blew with a “soyo soyo”, Isaac looked up at the sky and drew his bow to the maximum quietly.

「.....」

Although the bowstring resounded with a “hyuu”, the bird calmly flew away as it was. Isaac frowned and looked back towards Lucius over his shoulder.

「...Since it's so far away, it can't be helped that I missed, right?」

「If it's a person belonging to the army's archery corps, it's natural for the bird to be shot down but, maa, it's Your Highness」

「Hey, don't you feel your way of speaking is scathing?」

「Excuse me. I meant to say that a person like Your Highness normally doesn't has to take up a sword or a bow」

Lucius smiled slightly and bowed, and then holding the edge of his mantle lightly, he raised his right hand overhead. A high-pitched cry resounded after several seconds and the bird from before fell from the sky. Without a moment delay, several young men of the Chivalric Order galloped on their horses to retrieve the game.

Isaac held up his hand over his eyebrows and gazed at the bird that was shot down, and then looked back at Lucius again and sighed.

「...How ostentatious. However, good skill」

「Thank you」

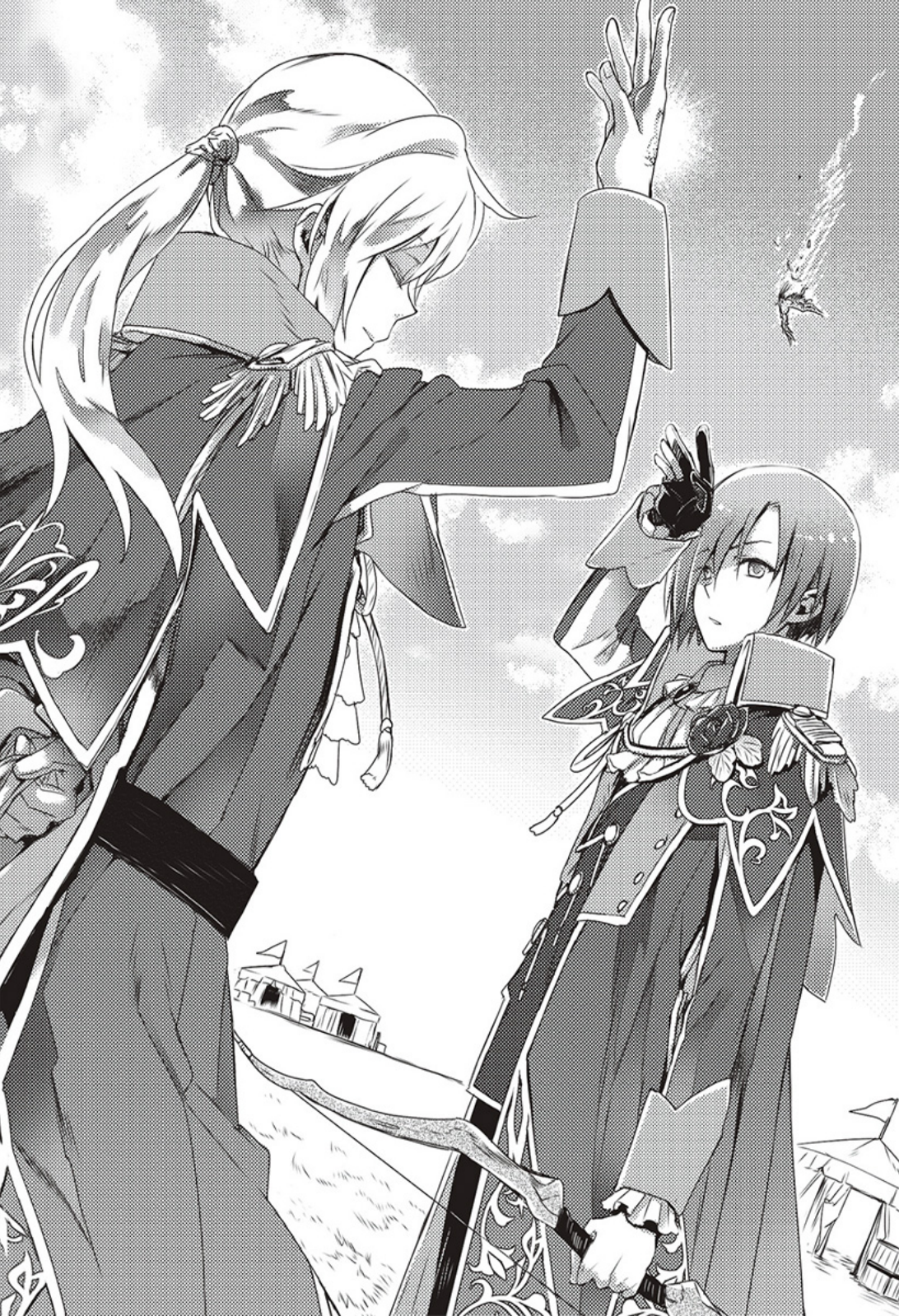
Lucius hid his right hand, where the magic crest vanished from, under the mantle and replied nonchalantly.

「If I can't do this much, then I'm unsuitable to be in the Seal Chivalric Order」

「...Even though I'm the leader when I can't use magic well?」

「Your Highness is fine. You're His Highness after all」

The Amaddo's Crown Prince; based on that point only, he was appointed as the leader of the Seal Chivalric Order. In the first place, the group of magic warriors that was organised to protect the “Hill of Seal” might be in the process of becoming an existence like an Imperial Guards Chivalric Order now.



The Seal Chivalric Order, commanded by its leader, Isaac,—substantially, it was Vice-Leader Lucius—, headed to a prairie near the national border, set up camp there, and had been hunting under the name of manoeuvres since morning. Most of the members were practising sword superficially; otherwise, they were sitting down and chatting pleasantly, or amusing themselves with card games—in any case, it was as if there was no tension of a manoeuvre here.

Numerous tents hoisted with multi-coloured flags were set up nearby, and as it was exactly noon, thin smokes from meals trailed up. When one more hour elapsed, the bird which Lucius shot down moment ago would become a treat for the Crown Prince. It was like a picnic of nobles.

Isaac entered the shade of a large tree which towered alone in the prairie and spoke.

「...I want to hear your honest impression, Lucius-kun」

「What's it?」

「How many people among the current Chivalric Order can perform the same feat that you did just now?」

「It'd be great if there's half」

Lucius answered so, but he understood that there was even less in reality. Even though the quality of Amaddo's magic warriors had improved, the quality of the abilities of the young men who enrolled into the Chivalric Order decreased year by year. Although it was ironic, it was an unmistakable fact.

「That's to say, half of them are unsuitable to be in the Chivalric Order?」

「That's how I think at least. ...In the first place, what's important to the dignitaries of the grand nobles who are thinking of letting their grandchildren and sons serve Your Highness isn't magic or sword skills, but the amount of donation」

「How detestable, for such a convention to be enacted」

「This type of members aren't capable of protecting Your Highness and the royal family at the critical time, but there are many people who haven't thought of such matter at all」

「Ma, a flashy battle that'd involved even our Chivalric Order hasn't occur for more than a hundred years, so this isn't incomprehensible... but for the Chivalric Order that I lead to be a gathering of good-for-nothings and only for appearance is somewhat worrisome」

Isaac who was grumbling slightly shut his mouth suddenly and looked up at the sky.

「—」

When Lucius followed Isaac's line of sight, he spotted a tiny white pigeon flying from the west.

「...Even if I who can't use sword or magic say one thing or another, there's no persuasive power, and if I don't have at least an adequate skill of the bow」

Lucius stopped Isaac who had said so and was about to prepare the bow again.

「Please wait, Your Highness」

「N? What's it?」

「That's a carrier pigeon of our army. Considering the direction, it's likely a notice from Costacurta-geika who had headed to Biranoba」

「That means she had found out something at once?」

「It's possible」

Lucius went towards a tent in a trot.

With both the king and queen currently absent from the capital and

even the Crown Prince leaving Roma, the party had brought along a mobile pigeon house in preparation for the worst. Normally, a carrier pigeon could only return to its nest box, but this carrier pigeon that was raised in this pigeon house was able to return to it accurately even if it was moved to other places. It was a valuable object prepared as a means of communication to Kamunyas-kyou, but it was Lucius's concern that made Dimitar carried a similar pigeon.

A slightly dark tin tube was fastened onto the leg of the pigeon that had headed to the mobile pigeon house and descended with a “hata hata”.

「It was earlier than I imagined...it's great that it didn't prove to be a fool's errand for coming here」

「Please wait for a moment」

Lucius retrieved the rolled up memo from the message tube. The other members had also gathered in the vicinity of Lucius and Isaac.

「So, what did the Ojou-san say?」

「...It seemed that the Seriba's case from the other day was unrelated to Biranoba. The likelihood of its government and army participating in that is low」

When Lucius had presented the unrolled memo to Isaac, he prepared the Crown Prince's seat near the bonfire. An assembly type table and chairs were carried at once, and Isaac's dining table was put together.

「...Fuun」

Isaac sat down on a wooden chair laid out with cushion and snorted.

「It's boring that the material to shake Biranoba has decreased」

「If their guess is right, I think that's enough to shake Biranoba...

but is Your Highness perhaps thinking of giving some reasons to crush them?」

When Lucius asked in a lowered voice, Isaac drank his sugared wine in one gulp and shrugged his shoulders.

「I'm not thinking to that extent. A buffer is necessary between Diruma and I also don't want to incur the enmity of Biranoba's strongly patriotic citizens. ...However, I'd like to sell them an even greater favour or make a large loan etc. if possible; isn't it convenient to have such trump cards in time of emergencies?」

「Hai」

「Then, maa, let's depart when the meal finishes. —Lucius-kun, I wonder if you can go first and enter Biranoba to drop a few lines to their Prime Minister-dono? Do pretend that we're travelling incognito to the utmost」

「With this large household, I feel that this isn't travelling incognito though」

Excluding the members, the party of approximately one hundred people was comprised of the chefs and even the attendants taking care of the pigeons. Lucius looked back at it and smiled bitterly.



Valeria filled the white porcelain bathtub that was carried in with Bettina's horsepower with water and took off her dress.

「Even though it's fine to borrow the mansion's if it's a bath~...」

Did Bettina who was made to assist Valeria's bathing unconsciously express her thoughts? She vented such complaints.

Thereupon, Valeria deliberately lowered her voice,

「Perhaps Dante-san may be the mastermind—, if I'm made to hear

such a thing, I can't enter the bathroom calmly, right!? I'll be unarmed while bathing!]

「I think Valeria-sama is strong even if you're unarmed though~...」

「It's an issue of feelings, feelings!」

“Hyu hyu”, she lightly drew a sign with her right hand and thrust it into the water with a “zabon”. She waited for a minute as it was and the lukewarm water gradually became warm.

「He—」

Seeing that Valeria heated the hot bath with magic, Bettina felt admiration and leaked out a sigh.

「—Toasting bread or heating a bath; as expected, magic is convenient in various ways if it can be used」

「I didn't experience pain for such things specifically. Rather, I don't use it for these kinds of things only in the first place」

If she was to enter the bathroom, rather than heating the hot bath entirely with magic, she'd at the most set a fire first and heat the hot bath normally with firewood. It was much easier and the efficiency was also good. Bettina might not understand even if she explained, but to make so much water into a hot bath in a short time, a considerable amount of heat which could burn a small house in the blink of an eye must be released in one go; in short, a seemingly simple and very advanced magic must be used.

It was mentally taxing to use such magic and she'd also feel hungry later. When a line of red light connected her right hand which was plunged into the bathtub to her cleavage, Valeria's mental power was undoubtedly exhausted.

Bettina stared at the magic crest's radiance earnestly and spoke up at this late hour.

「—Valeria-sama, do you really possess magic crests on your whole body?」

「What's this about, all of the sudden?」

「I mean, doesn't Dimitar-san has them on his hand or forehead only?」

「I don't know. Magic crests only appear when they are being used. ...Maa, it's true that I've them on almost my whole body」

There was a conceit of enduring that much pain within Valeria. It could be clearly said to be the only part where she didn't lose to that impertinent Dimitar.

Taking off her undergarments, Valeria submerged into the hot bath and grandly stretched herself.

「N—...」

「Valeria-sama...」

「Hai?」

「Your whole body means your bottom and...um, your embarrassing places too—?」

「I said almost, right, almost! Almost my whole body!」

「Then, there's none on your bottom?」

「You can't use them if they're on strange places, you know? The skin must be exposed to use the magic crest of that place」

「Ah, I see. ...Besides, you'll have to show it to Dimitar-san when the necessity arises」

With those few words from a nonchalant Bettina, Valeria recalled the matter in Seriba.

「.....」

She frowned and held onto her chest quietly in the hot bath. Although that time was a situation where her magic crests had to be restored before been discovered by the enemies, she'd become furious at having her cleavage casually pressed against and her waist touched even when she thought back on it now. Although she impulsively hit Dimitar hard afterwards, that still wasn't enough as a maiden's revenge.

「Nee, Valeria-sama」

「What...?」

「If the magic crests on your breasts disappeared or get damaged, must you still show your breasts to Dimitar-san?」

「...!」

「Valeria-sama?」

「N, no way! Of course not! Such a thing will never bufu!」

Valeria who was about to raise her feet onto the bathtub's rim broke her balance, sank into the hot bath up to her head and stood up hurriedly.

「—D, don't say weird things suddenly! I, it's embarrassing...!」

「But “exclusive” means this sort of things, right? You can't say it's embarrassing when the time comes, can you?」

「T, that may be so but...」

「There wasn't such a thing before?」

「W, why are you asking this sort of thing!?!」

「I mean, the relation between Valeria-sama and Dimitar-san seems bad. If that's the case, it may become rough—is what I think...

if it becomes so, then whose side shall I take?」

「You'll choose my side! Whose attendant are you!?!」

「That seems to be a matter of course...but probably」

Thereupon, Bettina gulped a little and prevaricated. Although she couldn't be seen due to the visor, she probably had shut her mouth.

「...What's it? Probably?」

「Ah, no...since you'll get angry if I say it...」

「Hearing you phrased it like that makes me want to hear it more and more though?」

Valeria made sure to lean forward on the bathtub's edge and urged Bettina on with a “zuzui”.

「But, um...then I'll say it honestly. In the first place, no matter what kind of situation it is, I feel that Dimitar-san's decision is more correct than Valeria-sama's...」

「You—」

Valeria raised her right which had a magic crest appearing on it overhead, but she submerged it into the hot bath with a sour expression. Although it was vexing, it was pointless to refute it.

「Fun!」

Sprinkling Bettina lightly with hot water, Valeria immersed herself into the hot bath again up to the tip of her chin.

「...If you become a magic genius like me, even if your magic crests are somewhat damaged, you can still offset that weakness. If I really have to say it, there's no need for that guy to appear」

「...Is that true?」

「What's with that doubtful intonation?」

「Iya, but...」

「...Maa, if they're damaged, there's also a magic crest that's the highest priority for restoration; in that case, I'll have to borrow that guy's help even if I'm reluctant to do so」

「Eh? Is it some sort of special magic crest?」

「...So you don't know it well, me neither. It's said to be a magic crest that was handed down since long ago to signify the status as a Dominas」

「Where's it?」

「I said it, right? That magic crests can't be seen unless magic power is circulated」

Valeria held her own body, curled up her back and pointed at the area around her left scapula over her shoulder.

「It should be roughly in this area...」

She concentrated her consciousness on her back slightly and poured in magic power.

「Ah...! A small magic crest resembling a rose has appeared!」

「Yes, that's it. I don't understand well, but only that magic crest has to be restored immediately if it's damaged. It isn't used for some magic in particular...how do I say, it's a sign of a proof? In that sense, it's something carved onto you when you're officially chosen as a Dominas. I had Karin showed hers to me before, but it's slightly different from mine」

「He—. Then it really is a proof of a Dominas」

「However, to carve this extra one takes time and feels painful. Sometimes, I become envious of the people who are living a life that's

unrelated to such things」

「...But I feel that the girls from all over the country still have the thoughts of wanting to become a Dominas」

“Kyukkyu”, while wiping her pink body that was sprayed by the hot water with a towel, Bettina murmured somewhat despondently.

「Even I, won't say to be like Dominas-sama as expected, but I'm still thinking of becoming able to use magic even now. If so, I might be able to help Oji-sama's research more...」

「...Sorry」

Thinking that she had hurt Bettina's feelings somehow, Valeria sat in seiza in the bathtub and apologised in a small voice.

Valeria had seen tens of these girls who had their dreams shattered and dropped out so far. If she had made one wrong step, she might have become like them too. Hence, if that was true, she should have understood the feelings of the girls who held a sense of failure, and yet she had said careless remarks without doing so.

Bettina spoke to the despondent Valeria in a slight panic.

「It's fine either way, why does Valeria-sama has to apologise?」

「That's because—」

「I'm sure that I'm similar to Oji-sama. Oji-sama also can't use magic. But, the circumstance where normal people also can't use magic is precisely why I think Oji-sama started his current research」

「I see.....」

「By the way, if Valeria-sama doesn't get up soon and take a nap, wouldn't it be troubling later? There are preparations to be done too」

「...You're right」

It was obvious that Bettina was being mindful towards her who was feeling depressed, but Valera decided to go along with her.

Chapter 05 - Night of the Red and White Clovers

At the very least, the present **magic warriors** didn't know of a medium that was more suitable than their own bodies for manifesting magic.

Magic warriors circulated magic power into the magic crests which were carved onto their bodies with their will. The shape drawn by that circuit became a magic square and made powers of miracle appeared in this world.

However, an alloy which was good enough to substitute the human body as a medium and manifest magic was created, and spread secretly and rapidly. Its developer was the Amaddo Army Third Arsenal's Chief Engineer,

Quique Albiol.



He was also undoubtedly a **genius**, albeit eccentric.

If one was to take charge of a whole country's government, then a deep and extensive knowledge was necessary. The vast amount of books collected in this library aided his career as a politician and could be called his support. In order to become a Dominas, Karin had read a huge amount of reference books as expected, but their quantity in her personal library, the Rudbeck House's, could by no means be compared to the Valiente House's.

Karin, who was looking up at the bookshelf like how she had looked up at it with awe and envy when she was a child but from a slightly higher viewpoint, heard the sound of door closing and looked back.

「...I've kept you waiting, Karin」

Dante who had entered the room while playing with his curled red hair with his finger was wearing a dark red vestment signifying his current status.

「I'm sorry. I understand that you're busy with work」

「No, I don't mind」

「I want to talk again just by the two us before returning to my country」

「You're returning to your country already?」

Dante's eyes became round in surprise.

「Hasn't it been only three days since you came here? Didn't you spend half a month or a month here in the past?」

「This's different from childhood. Similarly to how you've realised the deputy prime minister's title, I'm also interested in the title of a Dominas now」

「I know that but...I don't want to send you back as it is」

Dante leaned against his favourite desk and folded his arms. Karin thought that each of his theatrical actions was exaggerated.

「—The thing that I said to you before wasn't a joke」

「I'm sorry, what was it?」

「It's about me hoping to take you as my wife. You're good in feigning ignorance as usual」

「...I remembered」

「That's good to hear」

「I should have said that it wasn't a question that can be immediately replied to」

「Can you hear me out first, Karin?」

Dante opened the desk's drawer and took out a bunch of documents with finely written characters.

「...What's that?」

「It's the draft of a petition that I intend to report to His Majesty soon」

Saying so, he held them out to Karin.

「...Is it fine for me to read it? I'm from Amaddo, you know?」

「I don't mind. Rather, the conversation can't proceed unless you read it」

Since it was Dante's proposition to the king of Biranoba, it had to be deeply connected to their national interest, but Karin scanned through it like she was told to.

「...Magic warriors' training institution?...」

「Yes」

It was a petition stating that a place like the Magic Academy in Amaddo should be established in Biranoba. The summary of the required budget and the timetable for until when magic warriors could be produced practically etc. were written down quite meticulously.

「—The Holy Alliance was originally the twelve magic warriors who helped Redountra sealed the “Demon”, but it stemmed from the countries which were founded to surround the current “Hill of Seal”」

It might be nothing new to the Dominas you though—Dante made a preface like so and began to talk to Karin.

「They became kings eventually, and after Redountra fell into slumber, they kept surveillance to ensure that the seal doesn't come undone. They left behind twelve Dominas, one to each of the twelve countries, so that the "Demon" can be sealed again in the worst case. Henceforth, even if we temporarily lack a Dominas, their number continues to be the same even now without changing」

「...That's right. Until now, there were several occasions where a substitute was needed suddenly due to unforeseen accidents or deaths from illnesses, but nevertheless, I remembered that there wasn't a time when three or more Dominas were missing simultaneously」

「However, what happened to the number of allied countries?」

「.....」

Karin stopped her hand that was turning over the fine quality paper and looked at Dante with upturned eyes.

「Presently, just seven of the countries that participated in the alliance remained. Amaddo, Diruma, Haiderota, Mirzoza, Bito, Picabia and Garmany; you should also know what became of the other five countries, right?」

「...Biranoba is also doing well now as a quasi-signatory」

「Yes, a quasi-signatory. Still, it might be preferable that just the outward appearance as a country remains. Even if it's our Biranoba or Berdou」

Dante's gaze ran towards a picture frame that was hung on a corner of the wall. However, it wasn't a picture fitting of the Valiente House's family status that was displayed inside, but a picture map centring on Biranoba.

「—But Romarikku, Emelily and also Baragan ceased to exist in this world already. Moreover, Romarikku and Baragan were annexed by Amaddo and Haiderota, and vanished from the map's surface」

「I'm sorry. ...The current me can only reply with this much」

「It's not like I'm criticising your motherland's deed in particular. But I just want to reaffirm to you that the present situation deviates greatly from how the alliance should originally be」

Dante moved towards the picture map on the wall and said so. The Biranoba in the map was very small, and being pressured by Amaddo and Diruma in its east and west, it looked as if it'd crushed anytime.

「With just Amaddo and Diruma, they possessed nearly half of the entire alliance's territory and moreover five Dominas. This present condition can by no means be said to be well-balanced, right?」

「Isn't that balance fine if there's stability because of it?」

「A situation where there's a congregation of Dominas isn't desirable, and Amaddo's power becomes increasingly strong. Therefore, I want a small country like Biranoba to possess a Dominas similar to before. And I want Amaddo and Diruma to approve of it」

「And I'm to assist you in that?」

「It doesn't have to be right now」

Dante tossed the draft that Karin had returned into the drawer.

「It can be after you've finished serving your Dominas's duty. Come to Biranoba and marry me. And then I want you to guide the next generation at the magic warriors' training institution that I created」

「...You're barking up the wrong tree」

Although Karin was Dante's blood-related relative, she was a person of Amaddo to the bitter end. Abandoning Amaddo to live for Biranoba—which meant abandoning her House at the same time—wasn't simple.

「...I'm a Dominas as well as a High Grade Inspector of Amaddo,

and also the only daughter and heiress of the Rudbeck House」

「Indeed. That's why I said this at that time, right? It's possible to do so if you give birth to two children」

「...I'm sorry, I'll say this clearly」

Karin dragged up the shawl wrapping her shoulder and said to Dante.

「I don't want to give birth to your children. ...To say nothing of now, but also nine years later」

「That's—quite a shock」

Dante opened his eyes widely at Karin's words. Brushing up his forelocks, a fixed habit of his, he took in a deep breath greatly and shrugged his shoulders.

「I never thought that I'd be disliked by you」

「I don't dislike you. However, I cannot think of you as my future husband」

「Even as a partner?」

「I'm born and raised in Amaddo, and has no obligation to work for Biranoba. Besides—」

It'd be better if it (*Dante's draft*) was for ordinary magic warriors, but if he was going to create a genius girl that could become a Dominas, then a specialised educational institution had to be prepared. Also, a talented girl must be selected from a large number of candidates, and given thorough training from her childhood. The special annual budget that Amaddo invested in Dominas's training easily surpassed a somewhat small country's war funds.

Furthermore, for a country like Biranoba that had to start the training of magic warriors from scratch, a lot more budget was

necessary.

「...Does the current Biranoba has the national power to invest an enormous budget into magic training? This country certainly has become rich economically, but will the citizens still agree to your idea when they hear that the war funds will jump up by three times suddenly? What about the royal family?」

「There'll be a fundraising and I'll obtain the citizens' understanding then. Even if I can't obtain it, their antipathy can be suppressed」

「...I'm sorry, what do you mean by that?」

「Any more than this will be a secret concerning Biranoba's national interest. —However, if you accept my offer, I won't hesitate to speak freely without holding anything back」

Dante, who had stopped his hand that was touching his forelocks and laughed, recovered his serious look suddenly and added on.

「—You also want to know what I'm actually thinking, right? Didn't you come all the way from Amaddo for this?」

「.....」

Karin narrowed her eyes and pinched the fingertip of the long glove that she wore on her right hand. She then quietly poured magic power into the magic crest hidden beneath the long glove.

At that time, she heard Petra's shriek for the first time in her life and held her breath.



As Dante's mansion was originally distanced away from Buruan, it tended to become silent suddenly when the day got dark, but the vicinity of the Valiente House's detached residence was even more rustic. There were no lights of private houses in its surrounding and no sign of life except the occasional hooting of owls.

Late in the night, Valeria who had slipped out from the mansion secretly and came here while being shouldered by Bettina, looked up towards the hilltop from within the forest and frowned.

「...If it's from here, we'll be completely visible for a while until we reach that residence」

「You've come to understand things a little」

Dimitar who was replacing the cartridge of Bettina's back said so sarcastically. Although judging from his expression, Dimitar probably didn't intend to make fun of Valeria, but was only stating the truth.

Even if that was the case, it didn't change the fact that she felt offended though.

「.....」

Glossing over the anger which was welling up within her with a small cough, Valeria looked at the residence that was built on the hilltop again. Although its scale was quite small compared to the main house, if she was to consider that it was built for only one old person to rest in, it could be said to have an extravagant structure nonetheless. From what Karin had said, walking along the wall and around the perimeter of that land once took her about twenty minutes on foot. There also seemed to be a fairly large garden.

「...Even if someone was inside, it's time for them to be asleep, right?」

「There's the story of a caretaker-servant couple usually staying inside, but I don't know if that's true」

Dimitar who had finished changing the cartridge stroked his head and sighed.

「That means there's somebody else?」

「I've no definite proof, but that's likely to be so」

「Who?」

「Have you met that large man who greeted us on the first day anywhere after that?」

「Huh?」

「That tough fellow called Salomon Puyol. The one in charge of security」

「Ah...now that you mention it, I haven't see him at all」

「I've only seen him two, three times during the day. I don't see him once the day gets dark」

「Is there something wrong with that?」

「He probably a former mercenary or soldier of some place, and had accumulated a fair bit of experience」

「Is, is that so?」

「You'll understand if you see it from this perspective. ...Do you think it's this easy to slip out from a mansion that such a man is guarding? It was the same when Rudbeck-geika and I investigated the army's facilities. It was so easy to come and go that it was anticlimactic. Why in the world is that so?」

「That's—」

Even if she was asked why, she could only answer that wasn't it possible since they had actually slipped out of the mansion like this.

However, Dimitar pinched the nose of Valeria who was about to continue so with a “mugiyu!” and forcibly interrupted her words.

「Bumu!」

「There are three possibilities. Did that man skip out on guarding the mansion, or was he not in the mansion from the start—」

「What's the remaining one?」

「You'll be on standby here」

Dimitar rolled up his right sleeve without mentioning the third possibility.

「—In the worst case, the role of carrying Her Eminence, who dreams of a happy old age, on the shoulder and escape is yours」

「Um~...I, just a moment—」

「Endure that physiology phenomenon (*urge to pee*) as much as possible」

「No, no way...!」

「Let's go, Your Eminence」

Dimitar heartlessly left behind Bettina who had probably become teary-eyed beneath her visor, and began to walk in front.

「Don't take charge! I'll say this many times, but the superior is—」

「Don't dawdle, superior」

「This's infuriating...!」

「You're being noisy」

The forest ended before long and the gentle hill continued from there. Even under the faint moonlight, it was distinctly clear that an innumerable number of white petals were falling onto the slope that was covered in a greenery of white clovers. Excluding that, there was hardly any grove of trees, and there wasn't a place to hide at the critical moment as expected.

「—Hey」

Valeria asked Dimitar in a low voice.

「You said that there are three possibilities just now. Explain the last one」

「...You don't understand?」

「Eh?」

Dimitar, who was straining his eyes and staring fixedly at the residence, turned his head lightly and looked down at Valeria.

「You seriously don't understand?」

「That—」

Valeria who had thought “I was pitied on again!” almost screamed instinctively, but given the circumstances, it was also a fact that she didn't understand, and she somehow restrained her anger.

「...Can you explain in detail for my reference, Richternach-kyou?」

「Fun」

Dimitar removed the scabbard's clasp and pulled out his sword.

「—The third possibility is that he overlooked our movements despite noticing them」

「Overlooked...?」

「Thinking normally, the first possibility is non-existent since such a man won't skip out on his work. Similarly, it doesn't make sense for the person in charge of security to leave the mansion, so the second one is out too. He didn't skip out and wasn't absent, and yet he didn't guard the mansion. In other words, he deliberately created a chance for us to move easily」

「Eh...? Could it be that Dante-san has also noticed what we're trying to do...?」

「Of course」

Dimitar answered back casually.

「—It'd still be fine if it was just Rudbeck-geika and Petra, since they're relatives in the first place. However, you, Gacha Pink and I had shown up at the same time. If it's that sharp-witted man, he'd have immediately guessed that we didn't come along for the purpose of sightseeing. We were allowed to move freely」

「A, allowed to move freely...you were aware of it!?!」

「Rudbeck-geika and Rudbeck-kyou should have noticed it too. You and Gacha Pink didn't seem to notice it」

Although Dimitar replied calmly, Valeria couldn't maintain her composure at all. If Dimitar's conjecture was correct—if Dante was aware of everything—, then Karin and Petra who had remained in the mansion were in danger. There was no country that tolerated foreign spies.

「Why didn't you tell me anything if you had understood that much!?!」

「It was Rudbeck-geika who said that they'll remain in the mansion. ...In short, she concluded that it was better for us to take on this mission. Even if they're captured in the worst case, if it's those two, they won't be killed first」

「But—」

「They aren't completely incompetent too and they won't be caught easily. ...Based on such premise, we can only take action. If you still want to say more, return to Gacha Pink's place. I'll go by myself」

「I, I didn't say that I won't go! ...To begin with, I just said it this morning to stop going off on your own without me!」

「If that's the case, let's go quickly」

Dimitar covered Valeria with the mantle that he was wearing, and

in addition, carried her on his back.

「Hiwa!?!」

「Don't make noise at everything, you're being noisy」

Dimitar carried Valeria on his back and rushed out from the forest.

Dimitar whose physical ability was enhanced by magic was faster than any swift horse. There was hardly a person that could perceive Dimitar, who had slipped into the dead of the night and was running at this speed,—while wearing a black mantle too—with his naked eyes.

Dimitar ran up the hill just like that, clung onto the wall enclosing the residence's environs and muttered in a very calm tone.

「...It's an extremely high wall. Is it really a mansion built for his Baa-san's recuperation?」

「It looks exactly ideal for barricading oneself when something happens. Since it stands alone on a hilltop, it's good for commanding a view in any direction」

「Even if I think that it was built here with such factors in consideration, if it's that man, then it isn't anything strange」

Dimitar looked at Valeria over his shoulder.

「...Oi, try to put your feet on my shoulders and stand up. Can you not peek inside from above the wall?」

「Eh, is that fine?」

「I said to do it. You don't have to worry」

「...You know, I can endure anything if it's for the mission, but even so, you irritate me」

「Cease your irrational false accusation」

「Hai hai. ...Don't ever look up, okay?」

「Be at ease, even if you meaninglessly undress and climb onto my shoulders, I've no interest in the bottom or crotch of a thin young girl in the first place」

「Don't say crotch!」

Valeria placed her feet on both of Dimitar's shoulders and stood up timidly.

「Yo...」

Standing on tiptoes while her legs trembled with a “puru puru”, Valeria's face barely appeared over the wall. She then strained her eyes and surveyed the area.

「...How's it?」

「I can see a light...」

「So someone is there? They haven't sleep yet?」

「Rather, there are many lights and they're moving...」

「They may be the guards of this place. ...As I thought, it's different from what I heard」

「Even so—the Valiente House is really wealthy. Doesn't he own several such mansions here and there? Is the deputy prime minister job so profitable?」

「Who knows. However, the Valiente House is an old family that possesses territory not only within Biranoba, but also in Amaddo and Diruma. If managed well, maintenance of this much is possible」

「Why do Biranoba's nobles have territories in Amaddo?」

「When Biranoba ceded territory to Amaddo, they seemed to have avoided having their individually owned plots of land confiscated.

Thereupon, the Valiente House's territory remained inside Amaddo like an exclave」

「He—...even though they're relatives, it's surprisingly different from Karin's House」

Valeria jumped down from Dimitar's shoulders with a “hyoi” and sighed.

「—Karin's Ojii-sama was a person with a preference for spending money extravagantly, and he squandered the Rudbeck House in a flash. Karin will have a fairly hard time rebuilding it. That includes me, of course」

「Is that so?」

「When we met in the beginning...how should I say, we had a really serious relationship because Karin is that type. Anyway, our surroundings were all rivals aiming to be a Dominas. —However, once Karin and I realised that we were aiming to be a Dominas to somehow settle our grandfathers' generation's credits that we were burdened with, feelings of affinity budded instead, and we become on very good terms—」

「Oi」

Dimitar interrupted Valeria's statement and looked towards the mansion.

「...By chance, is that a mere talk about yourself?」

「Eh?」

「I thought it was some information that'd be useful for investigating this mansion and listened to you, but if it's just an idle talk, be quiet at once」

「I, isn't this much fine!」

「Your private life is none of my concern. It's just like how you aren't interested in my private life」

「What's that!?!」

Although Dimitar said so, Valeria was in fact just a little interested in his private life; rather than his private life, it was the story of his childhood.

After she completed her first job in Seriba, she heard from Lucius—the story where Dimitar was about to be killed by his biological mother when he was a child, and it had been on her mind since then.

Although she didn't ask for it, according to the rumours gathered by Valeria's father, it seemed that Dimitar's mother was made to do a double suicide with her child. The mansion where the parent and child lived was also burned down; what sort of circumstance was there for Dimitar alone to be rescued? Afterwards, Orvieto took custody of Dimitar and raised him together with Lucius like brothers.

If it was her spirit of curiosity, it was to this extent, but Valeria wanted to know about that matter.

However, there was no way she could ask such things in this situation. She might just be ignored even if she asked, and it was also vexing to yield to Dimitar just to have him teach her about it.

「Good grief!」

Valeria exaggeratedly brushed up her blond hair with tinges of orange, and said with a fed up face.

「—Even though I expressly thought of getting along with you since Lucius-sama had requested me to do so!」

「You can ignore what Lucius said. That guy read too much into things」

「Don't order me on everything! In the first place, don't refer

Lucius-sama as that guy!」

「It's up to me to decide how I call that guy, and there's no need to get along with you too. It's sufficient if we just do our best in the mission」

Dimitar smoothly warded off Valeria's anger and looked up at the wall again.

「—Let's go」

「Hiaa!？」

Carrying Valeria on his shoulder, he jumped over the wall and lay down on the ground with a “petari”. As most of the rooms weren't illuminated, the vast garden was enveloped in the heavy darkness of the night. Although the surroundings were barely visible due to the moonlight, nobody might notice them if they kept their postures lowered and held their breaths.

Looking at the lights moving randomly in the darkness, Dimitar muttered in a low voice.

「...I'm not sure how many guards are there, so forcing our way through is the last measure. We'll enter from above like last time」

「G, got it」

Valeria nodded deeply and began moving in a half-rising posture behind Dimitar.

「It's vast」

The building wasn't very big, but the garden was vast. Even when the person in recuperation wasn't here now, a gardener seemed to have come regularly to maintain it as a strong fragrance of flowers wafted from somewhere.

Once the light of a lantern disappeared, Dimitar stopped his feet

there, carried Valeria on his shoulder again and jumped.

「...Let's find the evidence quickly and return」

Kicking the top of a virgin statue that decorated the large pond, Dimitar jumped again and moved to the second floor balcony and easily picked open the lock on the window.

「You—」

「I've said it many times, but I haven't commit theft. Be it you or Rudbeck-geika, is it a Dominas's trait or something to treat people who're skilfully with their hands as thieves?」

「Karin said that too?」

「Indifferently」

Dimitar crept into the dark interior, surveyed the vicinity and sheathed his sword for the time being.

This room which had a nice view from its balcony might originally be the room of the old woman who was recuperating from sickness. It seemed to be converted into a lodging room when Dante came along after her death. Other than a bed, a desk and a cabinet lined up with sake bottles were firmly placed in a neatly maintained condition.

「...Search the drawers over there thoroughly」

「Ha? There's no way the armaments can be kept in such a place」

「We aren't searching for that only, but also clues to locate Nereida's whereabouts. ...Letters or something, I want documents that show the link of Dante and Nereida」

「Ha~a...you think the evidence can be found so conveniently?」

「How we think is irrelevant. At any rate, search for it. That's our job」

Valeria uttered a sigh while opening the desk's drawers in turns.

「...Even though I took great pains to become a Dominas, the jobs that I'm assigned to only seemed to be acting like a spy or a petty thief」

「Are you indignant?」

「Don't you say something like “quit if you're indignant”. I didn't say that I'm indignant」

「Then what's it?」

「It's different from reality, or perhaps I should say—」

「In short, like the bonbons who attended that party, you think it'd be nice if a Dominas dedicates prayers to Redountra throughout the day?」

Dimitar who had searched under the bed with his sword's scabbard showed an unpleasant smile and stood up.

「...You're a Dominas as well as a High Grade Inspector of Amaddo, and I'm also entrusted with both the roles of being your exclusive Hiera Glaphicos and an Inspector. In that case, we've to quietly obey the orders from above. That's court service」

「I don't understand the role of an Inspector well. In the first place, what does that job entail?」

「Domestic and foreign investigations」

「Investigation? On what specifically?」

「There's no specific regulations. In any case, every event that concerns Amaddo's national interest is target for investigation. ... That's why it can be broadly interpreted as much as one likes」

「...That's to say, a Jack of all trades?」

「To say it trivially, that's so, but only the king and his proxy can order the High Grade Inspectors. Basically, there's no need to follow the instructions of people other than them. You should act with a little more self-awareness that High Grade Inspectors are given a great authority of that much」

Having said so, Dimitar instructed Valeria on this and that, and occasionally kicked her bottom. Although she wanted to say “who's the one lacking self-awareness”, she knew that she'd be logically retorted if she said so, hence Valeria kept quiet.

「...Hmm?」

Affirming that opening all the drawers was a pointless labour, Valeria noticed the small knife that was placed on the desk together with an ink bottle and a quill pen. Its structure couldn't be described as especially unusual, but something felt out of place.

「...Ah, I see」

「What's it?」

Dimitar closed the cabinet's door and looked back.

「This knife—」

Valeria picked up the knife with her fingers and showed it to Dimitar.

「It's extremely simple and feels plain...」

「...That's strange」

「Un. I thought it'd be flashier if it's used by Dante-san...」

「He'd be sure to use something appropriate for his social status」

In fact, the furniture and stationery that were placed here were only things befitting of a great noble. The quill pen was also made from the tail feathers of a rare male sagittarius serpentarius.

Compared to those, this knife was very—to say it nicely, simple and sturdy; to say it badly, it was plain. It was definitely unusual as a noble's possession.

「.....」

Valeria pulled out the knife gently and looked closely at its blade.

「This's...a magic crest?」

Noticing faint and complex lines coursing through the blade, Valeria murmured so.

「Let me borrow it」

Dimitar held the knife that he had received from Valeria's hand.

When Dimitar poured in his magic power, the engraved magic crest on the knife's blade shined with a "boya~!", and a small flame lit up at its tip.

「...It seems useful for lighting up a fire in the fireplace」

Dimitar immediately extinguished the flame and laughed.

「It's quite a basic article...it was probably used when Nereida promoted herself to Dante, since it's the easiest to understand what magic engineering can do by showing an actual article. Did she coax him by saying that she can create more things than this and as many as he likes if he assisted her—」

「But isn't this weak as an evidence?」

「...Let's search the basement」

Dimitar sheathed the knife, threw it back to Valeria and quietly opened the door facing the corridor.

「If there are armaments being kept here, then they've to be in the basement. And if there's no basement, they'll be on the first floor」

「Why?」

「Think about their weight」

Moving slowly and quietly along the uninhabited corridor, Dimitar spoke while descending the stairs.

「—Simply put, the armours and swords are masses of metal. If such things are kept in large quantity in this type of room, the floor would collapse from their weight. In that case, they've to be in a spacious and strongly structured room where its floor, walls, ceiling and everything are covered with stone」

「That means—」

The first floor seemed to comprise of an entrance hall, a few guest rooms, and a dining hall that served as a living room too, but as far as they could see from peeking slightly, it was only decorated with a few armours and swords as works of art.

「...There's an underground storehouse for keeping food in our mansion too」

「I suppose so」

There was a stairway leading to the mansion's basement at the side of the kitchen. However, even though the mansion's interior was completely cleaned, it was dusty from that point on. Due to that, it was clear that a few footprints remained slightly.

「...It seems that the servants are prohibited from going any further from here on」

「...What shall we do?」

「Is there an idiot who'd come as far as here and then return without checking it?」

「I know that! That's not what I meant!」

「You're being noisy」

Dimitar rebuked Valeria who had raised her voice instinctively and observed the long corridor.

There didn't seem to be another stairway leading to the basement besides this. In that case, if the guards noticed them while they were descending to the basement, they'd completely become trapped rats. If this exit was set on fire, it'd be enveloped in smoke and might easily become a trip to the netherworld.

It was annoying to admit, but Dimitar should have also realised this since Valeria had realised it. Although Dimitar usually made quick decisions, the fact that he didn't try to descend immediately when they found the stairway might be because he couldn't discard that possibility and was perplexed.

Valeria drew out the knife that she found earlier, lit up a small flame, took the initiative and began descending the stairway.

「Oi」

「We don't have the time to be worried, right? There's the matter of Karin too, so isn't it better to finish up quickly?」

「...Maa, that's better than wasting time on hesitating」

As though making himself to decide, Dimitar muttered and followed after Valeria.



If this mansion was purely built as a place for an old person to rest in and was subsequently changed to a place of a secret conspiracy, then this basement might originally have been prepared as a storehouse for storing food and wine reserves.

If it was the mansion located in Buruan's outskirts, even if the stock of food ran out, it could immediately be bought from the market, but

that was difficult for this mansion which was distanced far away from the town. This storehouse should be fairly vast to stockpile a large quantity of food to prepare for a time when something happened.

As though to support Dimitar's conjecture, the stone stairway was wide enough for a large-build man to move while carrying a wine barrel and a sack of wheat.

「—Richternach-kyou」

Valeria who had descended the stairway earlier looked up at Dimitar with a somewhat tense expression.

In front of the girl was a reinforced door enshrined with an iron frame and rivets. It didn't seem to have a lock on it, but a small window attached with iron grilles cut through the door at eye-level.

「.....」

Perhaps Valeria might have recalled the incident in Seriba. There, Valeria's magic crests were erased, and she got captured and was almost deprived of even her chastity. It wasn't strange for that fear which she had felt inside the dark storehouse to remain as uneasiness even now.

「You can go back up and keep watch if you're feeling unwell」

「Huh?」

「A mental trauma is a troublesome thing. Apparently, many guys tried to forcibly overcome it and made blunders」

「...What do you mean?」

「Aren't you feeling scared to enter the basement because you recalled the incident in Seriba?」

As Dimitar's observation had hit the mark, Valeria's face stiffened

and her lips quivered slightly.

「...Since I'm a man, I can only imagine the feelings of you who freeze from fear when such things happened, but it isn't something shameful. It's probably normal to feel that way」

「...I don't want your sympathy」

「I don't intend to sympathise you. However, even if I take you along, you won't be very useful and will only increase my burden. If that's the case, there's no trouble in moving by myself」

「You're forbidden from acting alone! I've said this many times, right!？」

「Then don't make such a face that'd seem to cry at any time」

「I...It's not like I'm about to cry in particular!」

Valeria's face was flushed in a deep red and she abruptly struck the tip of Dimitar's shoulder with her small fist. She didn't think that it was good to hit a person to hide her embarrassment, but it probably wasn't bad now that she could move her paralysed feet.

「You might break your bone if you hit with your fist. If you want to hit no matter what, then use your palm」

When Dimitar had lightly dusted off the area of his shoulder ostentatiously, he grasped the iron ring handle and pushed open the door.

「...There doesn't seem to be anyone inside」

There was a fairly wide space like Dimitar expected, though approximately half of it was occupied by wooden boxes that were stacked up neatly. Placed in half of the area near the door, were a large work desk and a bookshelf reaching from the floor to the ceiling that were inappropriate for a food warehouse.

Walking timidly, Valeria lit a fire in a lamp that was hung on the wall, and knitted her eyebrows as though she had noticed something.

「This shield—」

Similar to the paintings that produced the gorgeousness of a noble's living room, this storehouse was decorated with shields aligned at fixed intervals. The shields, which reflected the lamp's illumination and shone in dull silver, were slightly small, but a familiar pattern was lightly engraved onto their surfaces.

Dimitar struck that surface with a “kotsun” and laughed.

「It's simple, but it's obviously a magic crest. ...And such a number of them too」

「What about the box over there?」

「Probably swords and armours, I guess. I'll search the desk」

Leaving Valeria to check the box's contents, Dimitar started to investigate the desk and bookshelf.

Inside a small vase which was placed on the desk were only the remains of a withered flower with most of its water evaporated. In contrast, there was no dust accumulated on the desk or chair. When he put these facts together and ruminated on it, it might have been at most one month or so since a person entered this storehouse.

Turning the pages of a book that he had pulled out from the bookshelf with a “para para”, Dimitar asked Valeria.

「...Did you find something?」

「Swords and spears...and armours here」

「You've found them then」

「—Does this means that Nereida did her research here from quite some time ago?」

「Who knows」

「I mean, there shouldn't be so many of this type of weapons and armours even in Amaddo, right? Wouldn't it take a reasonable amount of time to gather so many of these?」

「...That's true」

Dimitar shrugged his shoulders and looked back at Valeria.

At the feet of the seemingly puzzled girl lay a slightly short-sized sword and breastplate that she had probably took out from the box. Both of them were tinged with radiance like those shields that were aligned on the wall.

「I'm not sure if this's an accurate example since I'm not an expert...but it seems that it's necessary to do a treatment like plating with some special alloy to engrave magic crests on swords and shields」

「Plating?」

「Yes. ...It's possible to draw magic crests on that alloy's surface in the same way as how it's done on the human's body」

Dimitar pulled out only half of Jagieruka and showed Valeria its sword blade.

「—In reality, I helped the Chief Engineer to engrave this guy's magic crests. I can modify them to a certain extent on the spot」

「Then, mass production will be easy as long as that alloy can be prepared?」

「That might not be the case. There are too few magic warriors in this country」

「Is that so...the task of engraving magic crests takes time?」

「That's how it is. There are few magic warriors who can draw

precise magic crests. I don't think there's this sort of valuable talent in such a magic-undeveloped country. It's likely that Nereida had laboriously spent time to complete these. —It's queer that the said person isn't here though」

「Fu~n」

Valeria who had sat on the box jumped off with a “hyoi” and picked up a sword.

「—Contrary, is it easy to gather this much if it's Amaddo?」

「Yes. ...But that's if the conditions of the army providing a plentiful budget to the Chief Engineer and the Magic Academy cooperating extensively are attached」

Judging roughly from their appearances, the magic crests which were engraved onto the swords and armours here were far simpler when compared to Jagieruka's. Jagieruka had precise and complex magic crests, and several magic crests could be used properly by Dimitar's will, but each of the armaments here could only use one magic crest. If Jagieruka was a custom made one-of-a-kind item, then these were undoubtedly mass produced items.

Dimitar continued to check the bookshelf and discovering a bundle of papers inserted between the books, he narrowed his eyes.

「I don't know if this's drawn by Nereida but...I found that person's blueprints」

「Blueprints?」

「The design drafts of the magic crests. There are writings too. Whether it's Nereida's handwriting, if we take them and return to show them to Chief Engineer—」

Dimitar folded up the bundle of papers and stuffed it inside his vest. He noticed things like grains of sand falling down in small light bits and looked up at the ceiling.

「...We're heading back」

「Ha?」

「There's a sign that someone was running close by」

「No way! They noticed?」

「Perhaps the lamp's light has leaked out from the hole used for ventilation. Let's escape before the stairway is blocked」

「H, ho—」

「Follow behind me」

Dimitar picked up a sword and shield that were lying down, and headed towards the stairway.

「! There they are, seize them!」

As soon as they rushed out from the underground storehouse, such a voice came down from above the stairway.

Barely confirming his opponent, Dimitar wielded the sword while concentrating his consciousness into his right hand.

「...This kind of feeling, I guess?」

A vivid flame surged forth from the tip of the short sword. When he thrust out the shield in his left hand simultaneously, the violent wind produced from it fanned the flame. It became a scorching hot wind that ran down from above and engulfed the guards.

「Owa!?!」

「Gyaa!」

「...You're a hindrance」

Pushing aside the guards who were enveloped by the flame and

running about trying to escape, Dimitar held up the shield and ran up the stairway with Valeria without stopping. Although the guards seemed to be equipped with that sword and shield too, were they afraid of friendly fire in the confined space or they simply couldn't master them; they didn't use magic.

「These valuable toys are pearls thrown before swine」

Kicking down the guard before him with his momentum as it was, Dimitar jumped out to the corridor.

「Di...Richternach-kyou!」

「...If it's troublesome, it's fine not to use that way of calling every time」

「That's not it—in front! In front!」

Valeria pointed to the other side of the corridor. Several soldiers could be seen facing towards them and nocking arrows.

「...Don't use magic. Preserve your magic power since your turn will come afterwards」

Dimitar reminded Valeria with a whisper and held the shield aloft. The wind which welled up at once greatly deflected the arrows that were shot.

「...Certainly, even if an ordinary person becomes able to use magic, that person's endeavour is needed to master it」

Dimitar threw out the short sword as he spat out coldly, and before the soldiers could nock their second arrows, he shortened the distance and unsheathed Jagieruka.



When Valeria picked up the short sword and caught up to him, Dimitar had already cut down all the soldiers.

「.....」

Although she had several near-death experiences in Seriba, she had yet to grow accustomed to the redness and smell of blood. While trying not to look at the defeated guards as much as possible, Valeria held out the sword to Dimitar.

「Um...here」

「I don't need it. Just hold onto this for now」

Dimitar pressed the shield onto Valeria in place of the short sword, led the girl by her hand and rushed out of the mansion.

The deep darkness which had enveloped the mansion's surroundings until some time ago was now expelled by the flames of the torches and watch fires, and started to disappear. The dark shadows were casually brushed aside and there was hardly any place to hide.

「There they are!」

The soldiers carrying the torches noticed that the pair had rushed out from the mansion and ran. It seemed that they were also equipped with that sword and shield.

「We're retreating quickly」

「Is that fine? What about the evidence!?!」

There were definitely armaments which were made by using magic engineering here. Although they were here, there was no proof that it was Nereida who developed them. There was also no evidence of Nereida and Dante having a cooperative relationship, much less evidence of secretly assisting Hokon's revolt in Seriba.

「...Unless there's a very strong evidence, Amaddo can't judge Dante as a criminal anyway. At any rate, Dante isn't a person of Amaddo but Biranoba, and also its deputy prime minister. From the time I

realised that Dante seems to be the mastermind, I knew that we aren't chasing after simple evidence」

「Hold—」

Dimitar lifted Valeria, carried her on his left shoulder in a state where she was facing backwards, and ran.

「If it's you, you can use that shield. ...Be careful of the arrows」

「E...even though there's evidence..., you knew that it was useless!？」

「That's what I intended to say」

「Then why did we came here!？」

「Though it cannot become an evidence, I thought that Dante would become defiant and talk if we thrust the actual article before him and pressure him. ...Maa, we don't have to think about the obtained evidence's use. I've said this many times, but our mission is to gather evidence. It's not like we came here to pursue and arrest Dante」

Certainly, what they ought to think of now was to shake off their pursuers, returned to Dante's mansion, and linked up with Karin.

「—Don't bite your tongue, Costacurta-geika」

Warning Valeria lightly, Dimitar evaded the attack of a guard who came stabbing with a spear, and kicked the ground.

「Gugiu—」

He trampled on the guard's head, jumped onto the branch of an orange tree, and then jumped again towards the wall from there. When the guards raised voices of admiration and surprise at that agility, Valeria was already on the other side of the wall.

「Start a fire」

「Huh? What?」

「It'll confine the pursuers. If you start a fire with that knife just a little and fan it with a wind, that'll suffice」

「I, is that fine? This whole place may turn into a sea of flames, you know?」

「It's fine, so do it」

「...Why do you've to say it unsparingly like that...?」

「Make it fast」

「Hai hai」

Although Valeria frowned, she pulled out that knife, and scattered the small flames which rose on its tip onto the carpet of white clovers.

「...!」

When she looked up suddenly, she saw many lights running after them from the mansion on the hill. She also heard the neighs of horses and it was likely that they were pursuing with quite a large number of people. Valeria hurriedly held up the metal shield and fiercely stirred up the flames which had lit up alone on the dark greenery with a gust of wind.

「...Nice work. This'll buy us some time」

Dimitar glanced at the sea of flames produced at the rear over his shoulder, and rushed into forest where Bettina was made to standby.

「Gacha Pink!」

「Ha, hai! I didn't sleep desu, I didn't sleep desu you!」

Bettina who was sitting on the root of an oak tree sprang to her feet.

「—Is your urge to urinate alright?」

「It, it's alright desuu!」

「Then, we'll return quickly and link up with Rudbeck-geika」

Dimitar placed Valeria whom he was carrying on his shoulder onto Bachururus's head.

「...Though this isn't your way of saying it, constantly acting like a petty thief is boring」



A woman wearing a white robe looked around the dim room's interior and slowly sat down on a chair.

Although the room, which was entirely made of stone from the floor to the ceiling, wasn't dusty, there was a feeling of oppression that couldn't be cleared away. However, to feel calm from that might be an occupational disease in a certain sense.

After looking into the empty drawer and bookshelf, the woman pulled the cuff of her white robe and polished the monocle's lens.

「...I want you to prepare the same books from the previous laboratory」

「If you've a list, I'll prepare them at once」

The one who replied so was a woman who had covered and hid her whole body with a black robe and cape.

On one side was a woman wearing a white robe and sitting on a chair, and on the other side, was a woman dressed completely in black and leaning against the wall. Without crossing their gazes with each other, the extreme pair of women exchanged words while facing different directions.

「—What's the other thing that you need?」

「Money」

「This's a serious conversation, Maestro」

「I'm saying it in all seriousness though」

The monocle woman ran a quill pen across a pure white paper and answered without appearing interested. Chief Engineer—certainly, this woman's appearance might be appropriate to be called as such.

「—I can't conduct experiment if there's no money. If I can't search for a metal with better efficiency, I can't surpass Quique」

「You made Sorubakken」

「That was mostly made by you, right, Medou? I only created its form as a gauntlet. The essential magic crests were thought up and engraved by you. ...If Quique was the one helping you, Sorubakken would be more efficient」

The monocle woman wrote something down on the paper, pressed it against the woman garbed completely in black—Medou, and took out a khsier from her breast pocket. By shaking it lightly, a magic crest faintly emerged on the metal pipe bowl part.

「Honestly, when thinking whether Quique had seen the things that I put in Biranoba, I feel ashamed and my face burns with shame. Even if they're mass produced items, I don't want to think that I can only make such things」

「However, you're able to draw out a substantial funds from the Valiente House because of them. It's likely that you won't be troubled by research funds for a while. ...So, this is?」

「The list of books that I want for now. Prepare them even if you've to steal」

「Very well. ...What else do you need?」

「...Let's see」

The woman rose up from the chair and stood in the middle of the empty room. She faced the wide wall and slowly began to exhale smoke.

「Whatever Quique is making recently, I want the actual article. If possible, that enormous sword—」

Medou asked the woman who was hesitating to speak.

「...What's wrong?」

「Iya...actually, I think my assistance might be unnecessary for you」

「There's no such thing」

「After all, aren't you able to draw such a magic crest? ...It seems like no one knows it yet」

「It's regrettable, but that's not designed by me」

Medou shrugged her shoulders and shook her head.

「Even now...I simply remember just a little of the things that many people had forgotten」



「I think that's enough though」

「At any rate, I'll handle your request discreetly. It might be quite difficult to steal the sword from that boy」

The woman called Medou, who had said so and was about to leave the room, to a stop.

「Ah, I forgot another thing!」

「What's it?」

「Paint this place white with plaster or something」

「The wall?」

「Rather than writing small notes, I think there's no trouble filling them here」

The woman pointed at the wall and smoked the khsier.

Chapter 06 - Ice Petals

It was necessary to draw magic squares by circulating magic power into **spell crests** with specific movements for **magic warriors** to use magic.

In particular, when **Dominas** who had applied a large number of **magic crests** onto their bodies used magic, the displays of elegant movements with their whole bodies were likened to dances dedicated to Redountra.

The dances of those maidens, whose white soft skins were exposed and bodies were entwined with vivid magic crests, were considered to be very sacred and were accompanied by certain seductiveness as well.



However, men mustn't touch them since Dominas are God's possessions—wives of "**Lord of Redemption**". (TN: Kanji for Dominas means God's priestess/shrine maiden.)

It was a few hours until dawn when Dimitar had returned to Dante's mansion. Even in Buruan's downtown, it was a time when the shops of any places had their signboards taken down and its citizens were asleep. Needless to say, it wasn't strange if the area around the town's outskirts was enveloped in complete darkness and silence.

Nevertheless, that place was like a night-less city.

Dazzling lights leaked out from all of the mansion's windows, and noises of people could be heard. Evidently, it seemed that several people were awake and moving around.

「...They turned on the lights rather flashily and considerably」

Sitting on the wall and observing the mansion's situation, Dimitar stifled a wry smile that he had unconsciously leaked out, stroked his neck and sighed.

「What shall we do?」

Using Bettina as a stool, Valeria climbed the wall and asked in a low voice.

「Meaning?」

「Like—I—said! What shall we do after this!」

「Is it all right for me to decide? Rather, don't you've any ideas?」

「T, that's—」

「So there's none then?」

「T, there is! Um...s, secretly link up with Karin first—」

「Rejected」

「Haa!? Then why did you purposely ask me?」

「That's true. I was a fool to have asked you. Sorry」

Dimitar gave a superficial apology that was completely devoid of sincerity and stood up on the wall.

「...If Rudbeck-geika is captured by Dante, it might be impossible for us to link up secretly from the start」

「Isn't there a possibility where Karin wasn't captured?」

「...Let's say that you attacked the enemies and are about to get caught, how'll you prevent that?」

「Eh? With magic—」

「It's unlikely for the mansion to come out unscathed when a Dominas uses her magic and rages」

「Ah」

「Since that didn't happen, it's likely that abstracted, tall and lanky Hiera Glaphicos made a blunder and got caught. Although she should disregard that as a Dominas, even Rudbeck-geika might not be able to act carelessly in a situation where her cousin is taken as a hostage」

「I won't hold back even if you're made a hostage though」

「—」

When he suddenly looked at Valeria, she had a face that seemingly want to say 「I've said it!」. Being able to become conceited from this much meant, in a certain sense, that this girl would be a very happy person.

Dimitar shrugged his shoulders and,

「It's a wise decision. ...Ma, I doubt that you'll be able to win against an opponent that can make me a hostage though」

「.....」

Dimitar immediately crushed Valeria's conceited expression with a grimace, undid Jagieruka's clasp and looked back to his rear.

「Oi, Gacha Pink」

「Hai~」

「You'll be on standby here」

「Eh~? Again?」

Bettina who was at the bottom of the wall raised an unsatisfied voice.

「—I was made to wait in the dark forest the whole time just now too desuyou?」

「The “gacha gacha” noisy you aren’t suitable for a delicate mission. ...Don’t make me say it so many times」

「Aren’t Dimi-san the one with no delicacy~?」

「You’re noisy. As for criticising an adult, at least do it after you’ve become able to control your urge to urinate」

「It can’t be. That’s more difficult than winning against a wolf with bare hands desuyou」

「Don’t say an exaggerated thing. ...Anyway, you’ll be on standby here; plunge in when it becomes noisy inside」

「What shall I do if that doesn’t happen desuu?」

「It will. For sure」

「If by chance that doesn’t happen—」

「You’re noisy. I’ll definitely make it noisy so be quiet and wait」

Dimitar interrupted the obstinate armoured girl’s words and jumped down towards the inner side of the wall.

「Hey...what are you planning to do!?!」

Valeria hurriedly chased after Dimitar, lowered her voice just in case and asked.

「Though we discovered some evidences, we don’t know the whereabouts of the crucial Nereida. If so, we can only ask Dante」

「You can say that but...you intend to enter from the front?」

「The other party is expecting our return after capturing Rudbeckgeika. If so, it’s futile even if we try to take them by surprise and

rescue the hostages」

「Then what shall we do?」

「I've been made to do completely roundabout things until now. At least for the conclusion, I want to go directly from the front」

「Want to go...isn't that like going there to get caught!? Supposedly, they've taken Karin as hostage!」

「You're right...when the time comes, Dante may prioritise his ambitions over Rudbeck-geika. If he used Her Eminence as a shield, even I can't interfere」

Dimitar had calculated that even if Karin was captured, if it was Dante who was a relative, he wouldn't behave so roughly. But Dimitar also knew that it might not be an absolute thing. Ultimately, Karin might have only been treated politely when compared to Dimitar or Valeria. If necessary, Dante would undoubtedly use Karin and Petra as shields.

「You're going despite knowing that?」

「Yeah. ...That's why you don't have to come」

Dimitar took away the shield and knife that Valeria was holding, and jerked his chin towards the wall.

「...Wait together with Gacha Pink」

「I'm not waiting!」

Valeria grasped Dimitar's hand and spoke.

「—I can't be quiet when my friends are caught, right!? Besides, for me to entrust it to you only and standby at a safe place...that's impossible!」

「Look here—」

「I don't know what you're thinking well, but I somehow know your thoughts」

「...Do you or do you not know, which is it?」

「Shut up! Though it's exasperating, you trying to do something itself means that there's a prospect of victory, isn't there? There is, right?」

「.....」

It was troublesome to explain everything so Dimitar tried to face away and ignore her, but Valeria specially took a roundabout path to his front, and continued in a preaching tone.

「—Since it's D, Di...Richternach-kyou who always say proud things to one person or another, you won't move without having a prospect of victory, right? Not to mention, even Karin and Petra are involved in this situation」

「...The thing called prospect of victory doesn't exist」

「But you're thinking that it's not like nothing can be done, aren't you? You think that you can break the impasses, and that's why you're trying to enter from the front」

「...So what if I'm?」

「If that's the case, I should go too, right?」

「From my standpoint, it's not a good plan to expose you to dangers」

「It's the opposite, opposite!」

Valeria took back the shield and hit Dimitar's chest with her small fist.

「—If it becomes well-known that I watched from a safe place while I sent my subordinate Hiera Glaphicos to a dangerous mission, it'd

stain my reputation! I want to pile up achievements favourably, you too, right?」

「...You've a way with words」

「But that's how it is in reality, right? Besides, is there some good reason for you to assertively leave me behind?」

If he had to say whether there was a reason or not, it wasn't like there was one in particular. Naturally, it was best not to take Valeria along so as not to endanger her, but Dante might strengthen his vigilance if he didn't see Valeria's figure. That being the case, showing up all together might make Dante relax his guard.

「—It's fine to follow, but don't move on your own accord, okay?」

「Shouldn't I be the one to instruct such things rather than you?」

Valeria leaked out a complaint while hitting his chest again.

「Do you not understand? This isn't an instruction but a “suggestion”. If you're a capable superior, you'd have accepted it meekly. A narrow-minded superior wouldn't accept it」

「You're using that way of speaking again」

Although Valeria pouted, she started walking alongside Dimitar. It might mean that she agreed with Dimitar's words for the time being. Although there was no guarantee that she'd abide by his instructions when it really became a critical moment—in any case, Valeria had a previous offence in Seriba—she wouldn't act so rashly since Karin's life depended on it.

Dimitar gave the girl, who snorted roughly in secret and walked with big strides, a fleeting look and brushed his nape quietly.



「!」

Valeria, who had personally pulled open the foyer's door and entered the mansion, saw each direction that greeted them and instinctively gasped.

The hall where servants stood side-by-side in a row on the first day that she came here was crowded with soldiers shouldering spears tonight. They were wearing those wonderful breastplates that Valeria found just now in Dante's detached residence.

And now, sitting in a row from the large main staircase to the second floor corridor were the young nobles who had praised Valeria on the night of the party. At the centre, needless to say, was Dante Valiente.

After intimidating the surrounding soldiers with a silent look, Valeria looked up at Dante.

「Welcome once again—should I've said that, Valeria-jou?」

The smile of Dante who was touching his forelock was extremely brazen. She didn't think very much of it before, but as a matter of fact, she couldn't help but feel that it was unpleasant after knowing that he was an enemy.

The door closed immediately, and Valeria who was completely surrounded with Dimitar as a set opened her mouth after taking a deep breath softly.

「—Where are Karin and Petra?」

「Those are the first words you say in this situation?」

Dante stopped his finger that was twining his forelock and smiled wryly. A deep crease was etched on Valeria's forehead with a “biki!”, and she tried to raise her voice, but her toes were lightly stepped on and she swallowed her words at once.

「.....」

When she looked fleetingly to her side, Dimitar was grinning. Even though they were the same grinning expressions, Dimitar's smile was still more preferable than the current Dante's.

Dimitar placed one hand on his sword's scabbard and spoke to Dante with a loud voice.

「—What are you saying? It's natural for Costacurta-geika to be concerned about Rudbeck-geika's location」

「I've heard that the likes of Hiera Glaphicos are audacious...」

「I'd humble myself if the other party is the prime minister of a country, but if he's a criminal, then that'd be unnecessary」

「A criminal, you say?」

Dante shrugged his shoulders exaggeratedly.

「—Should you guys who arbitrarily sneaked into my detached residence be saying that? I had known from the start what all of you are doing」

「If that's the case, then say so. If you had, we might have saved troublesome labour and time」

Dimitar clicked his tongue slightly, held up the shield that Valeria was carrying, and showed it to Dante.

「—You had Nereida Kirugiakos make this, right? In addition, we also discovered swords, spears and breastplates. Preparing such things in massive quantity, what exactly are you planning to do? Conquering the continent?」

「You're noisy」

「...Ma, in any case, that's out of question with such inferior imitations. If those kinds of things can captured the whole world, our Amaddo would have unified the world a long time ago」

「Shut up—I'm telling you to shut up!」

At that moment, the expression of Dante who was smiling faintly until now changed completely. Was he infuriated? Dante clenched his fist, hit the corridor's handrail, and pointed at Valeria.

「What do you Amaddo's people understand!? You won't know the humiliation and pain of our Biranoba that has been continuously made light of so far!」

「I don't understand it well, but do you wish for us to know? If that's the case, you should have just said so. As expected, even the magic-advanced Amaddo doesn't have mind-reading magic. ...In short, you want us to sympathise with you?」

Without a moment's delay, Dimitar jeered at Dante. Naturally, Valeria didn't feel like sympathising with him in the least, but as for Dante, it seemed as if his already frayed nerves were rubbed the wrong way with a file. Dimitar's wicked tongue was truly merciless.

Dante struck the handrail once more.

「Your pretentious statement doesn't matter! More than that, where did you move Nereida to!?!」

「...What?」

「How much have you heard about us from that woman!?!」

Valeria frowned and looked up at Dimitar.

If they took Dante's words at face-value, then Nereida was certainly under his supervision, but was no longer around now. To make matters worse, it appeared that Dante was under the impression that Nereida's disappearance was Valeria's doing.

The seemingly puzzled Dimitar exchanged looks with Valeria, and when he exaggeratedly shrugged his shoulders before long,

「...There's no way we know where that woman is, right? To have kept these self-righteous and ignorant young masters who're like you company, aren't you tired?」

「Watch your words, Hiera Glaphicos. —I must have that woman work much more. I'll eventually persuade the king, and organise a heavy infantry group by means of magic engineering for the sake of having the superpowers recognise Biranoba's strength」

「...That's a splendid pipe dream」

Dimitar twisted his lips and sneered. He lightly bent over and whispered into Valeria's ear.

「...It seems like Nereida really isn't here. It looks like she escaped」

「That seems to be the case」

They realised that Nereida wasn't here already. Although they didn't know when she had disappeared, they could only coerce and get such minor information out of Dante.

Valeria gave a small cough with a “kohon”, and conversely pointed at Dante.

「—Anyway! Bring out Karin and Petra! If you release the pair safely, I'll show you kindness. You're this country's deputy prime minister, and to say the least, Karin's relative—」

「Kindness? You will, to me? —Amaddo will show kindness to me?」

Dante told a young man who was nearby something while giggling.

「—Do you not understand your position, Costacurta-geika? This should be the scene where you beg me for kindness, right? After all, you've committed espionage in our country. Even if Biranoba and Amaddo are first-class friendly nations, it's by no means a permissible matter」

「You want to say espionage?」

Dimitar snorted with a “fun” and pondered.

「If this matter is proclaimed to the world, the reputations of you and Karin who're Dominas will sink to the ground. Furthermore, the authorities of Amaddo which had made its Dominas act like spies may be forfeited」

「...And what of it?」

「It means the room for negotiation is created there」

Dante took off his dark red vestment completely, and patted the hilt of an excessively ornamented sword that was hanging on his waist.

There, the previous young noble brought Karin and Petra along and returned.

「Karin!」

「.....」

A rope was tied around Karin from the top of her dress. What was she thinking as she stared fixedly at Dante almost expressionlessly? On the other hand, as if disregarding this place's tension, Petra gave a bitter smile that seemed awkward, and apologised energetically.

「I'm sorry, Valeria. I messed up just a little and got caught. That's why Karin isn't in the wrong, really. It's my mistake~」

「I know that, so be quiet for a moment!」

Her rhythm had gone completely astray when she let Petra talked. Valeria silenced her older friend, faced towards Dante and shouted.

「Release the pair quickly!」

「I can't do that. I've said that they're negotiation's materials, right?」

「You want to get ransom from Amaddo?」

「Unfortunately, I'm not that in need of money」

「Then what is it!?!」

「What I demand from Amaddo is the right to retain a Dominas」

「Right...to retain?」

「...As I thought, it's that, huh?」

Dimitar muttered with a “bosori”. It seemed that this young man had predicted Dante's aim and was somehow peeved.

「The present Amaddo possesses three Dominas which the former twelve countries ought to have one each. Compared to that, it has been a long time since our country lost a Dominas. Our status in the prestigious “Holy Alliance” has also now become a semi-signatory. —I cannot be satisfied with that in any way」

While saying so, his passion which was hard to contain became a fire-like brilliance and flickered in Dante's pair of eyes. Perhaps this intelligent young man had felt humiliation, which was hard to bear, at the current position that his country was placed in since a long time ago.

「—Anyway, setting aside your feeling of frustration」

Dimitar spoke while stroking his head.

「It's shameless to take the pair, including our important Dominas, as hostages for the sake of carrying out that dearest wish. You can advocate whatever you want, but what you're doing is simply kidnapping」

「What are you saying? Karin was carrying out espionage—」

「Both of them are your relatives」

Dimitar interrupted Dante's words and smiled brazenly.

「...The two of them were just wandering about in their relative's mansion. They weren't carrying out espionage. —Or so our country's statesman-sensei would claimed if it's him」

「Aren't you the same too!? You sneaked into Valiente House's detached residence and stole the things there!」

「Although you said steal—」

Contrary to the excited Dante, Dimitar was indifferent to the end and didn't change his seemingly controlled tone. As a result, the composition of a calm and composed Dimitar and a cornered Dante was portrayed clearly.

「...Certainly, we found a large number of research results and documents that are related to magic engineering in your detached residence. Apart from imitations like this shield, there were numerous documents that corresponded to Amaddo's military secrets. Why were they in your—Biranoba's Deputy Prime Minister's detached residence? Though Nereida Kirugiakos is someone who did research related to highly classified information in our country, you sheltered and let her continued her research there while knowing that? This's a serious problem」

Dimitar smirked and continued.

「...Can you give a justifiable explanation in regards to this? Not just to us, but also Biranoba's king. Are you able to throw out your chest and give a convincing explanation?」

「A pointless sophistry—」

Grasping his sword's hilt tightly, Dante's eyes twitched.

「This talk of which side is justified is inconsequential! Right now, it's about which side is standing dominantly in reality! Bear that in mind, Hiera Glaphicos!」

As if in response to the master's shout, the spears of the soldiers who were surrounding Valeria and Dimitar formed a small circle. The sour look of that Salomon Puyol also blended into that unnoticed.

「...Is it fine to not think this through?」

「What?」

「...Whether it's justified or not; is it all right to not think about such matter?」

Pulling out the magic knife that Valeria had found in the detached residence, Dimitar repeated while holding up his fingertip and shaking it with a “fura fura”.

「Then this talk is simple. —In short, it's fine if we make it such that the winning side puts the fault on the losing side」

Dimitar pointed the knife's tip towards Dante and unsheathed the sword on his waist with his right hand. Salomon, who was expressionless and maintaining his standing-at-attention posture until now, saw that and opened his eyes wide.

「Just a minute—」

Valeria pulled Dimitar's sleeve.

「What are you planning to do!? Even though Karin and Petra are caught!」

Based on Dimitar's character, it might be absolutely impossible for him to capitulate helplessly to a man like Dante, but Karin was currently a hostage, thus he couldn't be rash. In the first place, it was none other than Dimitar who predicted that Dante might harm even Karin when needed.

Nonetheless, Dimitar shook off the hand of Valeria who tried to restrain him, and muttered with a faint smile.

「Rudbeck-geika has quite a good style」

「Haa?」

Valeria couldn't comprehend the meaning of the words that Dimitar had abruptly let out.

「It's not to your extent, but maa, it sticks out where it should sticks out and curves in where it should curves in. —But after all is said and done, she has nice legs」

「...What are you saying?」

「Those are dangerous legs」

Valeria stared at him in amazement with a “ha!”, and looked up at Karin

「...I'm sorry, Dante」

At that moment, the captured Karin who was beside Dante spoke for the first time.

「It seems like I've overestimated you a little. I'm truly sorry, Dante」

Dante narrowed his eyes and slowly looked down on Karin.

「...What are you saying, Karin?」

「Setting aside the past, you're after all a person of Biranoba that's currently still a magic-undeveloped country」

In the eyes of Karin who had turned towards Dante, there was a colour similar to sympathising with him.

「...If this's Amaddo, you shouldn't think that it'll be fine to just bind a captured magic warrior with rope. To have not pay heed to such matters, you don't have the qualification to establish a magic country. ...I'm sorry to have said this bluntly, Dante」

The long hem of Karin's dress shook greatly with a "fuwari".

「Certainly—I'd erase her magic crests if I'm in your position; otherwise, I'd put her to sleep with medicine or something. It's because you're a person of a magic-undeveloped country that you didn't even think to that extent」

Immediately after Dimitar had sneered coldly, a chilly tempest that violently shook the entire hall welled up suddenly.

「—!?」

In the middle of the unseasonal north wind was the right leg of the captured Karin Rudbeck. A bluish-white magic crest emerged distinctly on her leg which flickered beneath the hem of her dress that was fluttering in the gust.

「Damn—!」

「Dante-sama!?」

When Dante reflexively tried to protect his face from the small ice grains that were mixed into the wind, the consciousness of Salomon who was worried about him almost strayed away from Valeria simultaneously.

「That's why I said that she has nice legs, right?」

Dimitar squinted in the strong wind that was stirring up the hall and threw the knife that he was holding over his shoulder. The knife that was clad in magic flame became a long, straight and deep crimson arrow. It tore through the circle of soldiers who were flustered by the unexpected situation and pierced the display window.

「A pink raging bull will plunge in if she notices that. ...Let's go, Your Eminence-sama」

「Eh? —Kya!?」

Dimitar's hand struck Valeria's bottom.

「Ko, ko...aaa, I, I'll retort afterwards! Definitely!」

Valeria swallowed down her anger towards Dimitar and revealed her right hand. The sharp blade of “Tornado (*Furigana: Razor*)” flew straight to the middle of the strong wind and cut the ropes that were binding Karin and Petra.

「Karin! Now!」

「Don't escape! Karin—the place where you ought to be is here, you know!？」

While being protected by Salomon, Dante nevertheless faced Karin and stretched out his hand.

「...I'm sorry」

Removing the remains of the rope and throwing it away, Karin softly held down her hair that was fluttering in the wind.



Even the unseasonal gust which Karin had created might not be able to keep them confused like so for a long time. In fact, Salomon who was deemed to be the strongest had moved from the position of protecting Dante, and was already squaring off against Karin. The other soldiers were also setting up their spears and attacking in succession as though to obstruct Dimitar and Karin from linking up.



「By the way」

Brandishing Jagieruka with a “burun”, Dimitar inquired.

「—Assuming that Rudbeck-geika and you are about equal, what's the extent of Rudbeck-kyou's magic ability?」

「Petra's?」

「Yeah」

「That's, though they were the same Dominas candidates, since she dropped out midway—」

「She falls behind by several levels, huh? ...Then it's better to evacuate her」

Karin and Petra, who ought to be captured and were standing side-by-side a while ago, were currently separated. Although Karin who was squaring off against Dante was still fine, no matter how one looked at Petra, she was screaming and was being chased around. It was likely that she'd be caught again before long.

There, a pink mass smashed down the foyer's door and barged in.

「Gua—」

「Gihii!？」

The soldiers were flashily blown off together with their screams. While the place was briefly frozen by surprise, the pink armoured girl who emitted a vivid lustre took out a retractable battle axe from the back of her hips.

「Fushu~...according to your summon, Bettina Albiol now intrudes at the scene desuu!」

「You noticed it well」

When Dimitar lightly kicked the solar plexus of the soldier in front

of him and made him fall forward, Dimitar stepped on the opponent's head that had lowered to a just right height, and jumped at once.

「—Rudbeck-kyou!」

Landing on the corridor's handrail, he casually kicked the young nobles whose eyes were wide opened in surprise. This was a tough world; he didn't know about those insignificant soldiers, but as expected, when it came to these nobles, he shouldn't kill them thoughtlessly if he considered the future troubles.

「Bugu!」

「Boa...」

Dimitar rudely stepped on the young men, who had spouted nosebleeds and collapsed, and stretched his hand out to Petra.

「Come, Rudbeck-kyou」

「A~n! I was frightened~」

「Is that so? ...You're a boisterous woman」

Dimitar once again casually swung Petra, who was on the verge of tears and was trying to cling onto him, and called out to Bettina who was downstairs.

「Gacha Pink! You protect her! Rather, escape as it is!」

「Eh!? W, why?」

「It's a hindrance when a woman who can't be a fighting power is hanging around! I can't move to the best of my ability!」

Saying so, Dimitar threw Petra.

「Kya—」

「Richternach-kyou!?!」

Valeria who was engaging the regular soldiers with Bettina noticed the falling Petra and raised a shrill voice.

「Bet...c, catch her, Bettina!」

「Ha, hai ha~i!」

Bettina extended the battle axe, greatly rotated it once with a “gurun”, and swept away the surrounding enemies. She then went directly below Petra immediately and caught her body.

「Oi, Gacha Pink!」

Dimitar, who had followed Petra and returned to the hall on the first floor, jerked his chin towards the foyer’s door that Bettina had destroyed.

「—Go quickly!」

「B, but, is that fine?」

「I told you to go!」

「I mean, isn’t there a lot of enemies! Even I want to help desuu~!」

「If you want to help, then disappear right now」

Dimitar placed Petra who was being carried in Bettina’s arms on the head of her armour, and kicked the little girl’s bottom.

「—It’s dangerous for us if you rampage like this in a confined space. Setting me aside, if you make a mistake and Her Eminences get caught up in it, it won’t end with you and Chief Engineer being sacked, you know?」

「Abababababa...I, I won’t do such a thing!」

「Then get out quickly! You’re a hindrance!」

「R, Richternach-kyou! Karin is—」

「Don't worry about us. ...We'll link up shortly. After cleaning up these guys here, we'll follow you」

「I won't let you...!」

A mass accompanied by a thirst for blood descended in front of Dimitar who was about to face the staircase again.

「.....」

Salomon Puyol brandished a gigantic axe and jumped down on the spot where Dimitar had instantly backed away. The axe that he was holding was even more brutal than the one that Bettina had used; moreover, this man wasn't enhanced by magic, and was wielding it with natural physical strength. Dimitar couldn't help but say that he was a formidable master.

Dimitar narrowed his eyes and spoke in a low voice.

「...Rudbeck-kyou. Lucius ought to be arriving soon. Please escape from this place with Gacha Pink and join up with Lucius」

「...Understood. Please take care of Karin」

「Yeah」

「All right, we're going, Bettina-chan!」

「Haai!」

Petra's magic separated the soldiers into two, and a pink armour dashed through the path that was created there. There were soldiers who tried to pursue the pair hurriedly, but they were stopped by Salomon's throaty voice.

「There's no need to chase them!」

Salomon aimed the battle axe that he had raised highly at Dimitar, swung it down, and commanded the soldiers.

「It's fine as long as we seize the Dominas! Consolidate the defence and block up the escape routes!」

「...I don't intend to escape though」

Dimitar, who had evaded the thick and solid blade by a hair's breath, caught Valeria in the corner of his vision, and subsequently searched for Karin's figure. However, Karin who should have been in the corridor until a while ago wasn't anywhere, and Dante had also disappeared before he knew it. Both of them might have moved towards the inner part of the mansion.

It didn't seem like he had the leisure to spend too much time and fight.



Karin tore off the dress that had a large rip due to her magic to suitableness and cut it short. She then ran after Dante and went towards the mansion's interior.

At times, there were soldiers who came chasing from behind every now and then, but she incapacitated each of them with one blow while looking over her shoulder. Magic crests were engraved onto those spears and swords, and it seemed that magic could be used as it was, but nevertheless, it couldn't be helped but said to be reckless to try to oppose a Dominas with magic.

「.....」

Perhaps it was considerably distanced from the entrance hall, the noise of battle became very far away. However, that might be convenient for her to settle things with Dante.

Discarding her long gloves, Karin opened the door and left it as it was. She quietly peered into Dante's study and opened her mouth.

「...Where are you, Dante?」

「It's regrettable...very regrettable, Karin—」

「—」

Karin heard Dante's voice from somewhere and headed further inside.

“Jyarin...”; a stiff sound like metals rubbing together could be heard. Karin had a hunch that it was the sound of a sword being pulled out from the scabbard. She recalled that there was a dull shining metal scabbard adorned with gems and mother-of-pearl on the waist of Dante who had ran inside some time ago.

「I wanted you to help me realise my dream...and that conversation which I had with you was in fact, my sincere feelings」

「I see...if it's a joke, I can still laugh and shrug it off but...I'm sorry. You're serious, aren't you?」

「—That habit of yours isn't fixed in the end」

Dante's laughter could be heard from the large hall that became the party venue a few days ago. Karin believed that he was waiting there.

Karin untied the shawl on her shoulder and wrapped it around her waist. The exposure was suppressed unlike her Dominas's ceremonial clothes, but unless her magic crests were exposed as much as possible, she couldn't use magic efficiently.

「However, you don't really think that I'm bad, right?」

Dante spoke in the deserted hall.

「Though you've the habit of immediately apologising with an “I'm sorry”, you don't really think that I'm bad. —You were originally a very proud and arrogant child, so you weren't a person who'd willingly apologise to others at all. Hence, your Haha-ue disciplined you from childhood to express and apologise at every opportunity」

「...So?」

「Therefore—you don't really think badly of me even now. Even though you're trying to crush my dream, you don't think that I'm bad even the slightest」

「I don't want to destroy your dream in particular. ...However, it's just that my dream won't come true without Amaddo」

「Then I've no choice but to be forceful...」

A large round shield that Dante didn't have until a while ago shone in his left hand. A complex magic crest emerged faintly on its surface.

「—It's said that a Dominas's magic power can repel even a heavy knight...but how about you? Have you actually give and take lives?」

Dante waved his mantle and swung the sword that he was holding once.

「—」

Karin avoided the flame arrow that flew from its tip, twisted her body gracefully, and raised her right hand overhead. A bluish-white line ran from near her low-cut décolleté to her right fingertip. An enormous magic power was condensed and ran through in one go.

「—Ha!」

A stone of ice which gave the impression of an icicle flew from the fingertip that Karin had directed at Dante.

However, just before that stone came into contact with the shield that Dante had held aloft, it fragmented and disappeared.

「...?」

「Does Amaddo has things like this, I wonder?」

The face of a triumphant Dante appeared from the back of the

shield.

「...That woman is definitely a genius」

「The person using it may not necessary be a genius though」

「Shall we try and see, Karin? —Will you get tired out and become unable to stand up first, or will this shield be smashed up first?」

「If that's what you wish for」

Karin nodded slightly.

「...Perhaps I'll listen to your wish, since I think this's the end」



「We're the “Patriotism Magic Corps”; people who greatly admire Dante-sama's chivalry and work for that herald...we won't allow you who're like the superpowers' pet dogs to hinder that progress—」

Dimitar evaded the blow of Salomon who was throwing hatred and greatly leaped to the rear.

「...You've become talkative all of the sudden, Ossan」

「Can you decrease the number of words you speak a little too?」

Valeria took up a position where she became back to back with Dimitar and said so with a low voice, though she might not have the room for those words. When looking at her shoulders heaving up and down slightly, it seemed like she had been accumulating fatigue gradually.

On the contrary, it didn't seem like the number of soldiers who were encircling their surroundings had reduced very much. Needless to say, a considerable number of them were injured in the fight against Dimitar and Valeria, but above all else, the height of their fighting spirits was troublesome. They didn't lose their fighting spirits with a few wounds and would face Dimitar and Valeria until they

couldn't move.

Dimitar didn't especially hesitate in a fight against such people who could be called fanatics. However, that might not be the case for Valeria who wasn't accustomed to injuring people. Her kindness was unsuitable to corner people to that extent.

Dimitar understood that he should take on the necessary role of a villain in such times.

Noticing that Valeria was looking fleetingly upstairs, Dimitar muttered.

「...Do you remember this mansion's structure?」

「...Ha?」

「In your case, rather than not remembering it, you didn't check it?」

「What's it, being sarcastic at this late hour?」

「I want to say it insistently, but I don't have such free time」

There was only one more staircase that went up to the second floor from the first floor in this mansion's main building. A small staircase used primarily by the servants existed in the opposite side of the mansion, but to reach that staircase without going via this stair hall, it was necessary to go outside the mansion once and take a large roundabout path.

「This place is already enough with me alone. You'll go act as Rudbeck-geika's support」

「Eh?」

Dimitar stabbed Jagieruka into the floor, grasped both of Valeria's hands, and swung greatly.

「Hiwa—!?!」

「...Go」

Dimitar, who had rotated thrice in high speed, faced the second floor, and thrown Valeria with that momentum, promptly pulled out Jagieruka.

「Nu—!」

Salomon who had reacted quickly tried to run up the staircase and chase Valeria.

「There's no need to get worked up over a young female opponent, right?」

「Chi—!?」

Dimitar gripped Jagieruka with both hands and did a full swing. The magic power that dwelt in its blade became a red flame and blew upwards, swallowing Salomon who had promptly held up his battle axe and stood ready.

「Gu...nu!」

The back of Salomon who had stopped the huge fireball crashed into the staircase. His large build was buried halfway into it, and the scattered flames began to lick the staircase.

「Richternach-kyou!?」

Valeria, who landed on her bottom and patted her hips, clung to the handrail and stood up.

「It's fine, so go quickly! ...If possible, it'd be helpful if you can set fire to that side」

「But—」

「Rudbeck-geika needs assistance, right? ...It's fine, so go」

Valeria nodded slightly with a “kokun”, scattered big lumps of

flames at her feet, turned on her heels and started running towards the mansion's interior.

「U, nu...!」

Salomon, who had rose up while breaking the staircase, saw Valeria disappeared at the other side of the fire, and a deep crease was etched between his eyebrows.

「When thinking of your master's position」

Sighing lightly, Dimitar stroked the nape of his neck.

「—Isn't it better to do something about the bonbons who're collapsed over there first?」

「Gu, mu...!」

It seemed like Salomon wanted his subordinates to pursue Valeria, but in the end, he couldn't help but prioritised the rescue of the unconscious sons of the nobles. Whether Dante's aspiration would bear fruit or fall apart here, Dante's position would get worse to that extent if the nobles' children, who were his collaborators, were burnt to death.

While the soldiers were carrying the young nobles out from the hall, the fire that had increased in force was licking the staircase to the utmost. As long as this fire wasn't extinguished, it was difficult to head towards the mansion's interior via its side, not to mention going up to the second floor.

With this, only Valeria could cut into the fight between Karin and Dante for the time being.

Afterwards, if Dimitar disposed the enemies remaining here, the match would be almost settled.

「Leader!」

The soldiers, whose hands had become empty, set up their spears and approached the back of Dimitar. Seeing faint lights gathering at their spearheads, Salomon hurled a rebuking voice.

「Stop it! Do you intend to intensify the force of the fire further!?!」

「Haa...b, but—」

「What imperfect secret weapons. Or are they too much for amateurs to handle?」

Dimitar raised his lips coldly. Although they gave themselves an exaggerated name like “Patriotism Magic Corps”, with the magic crests that were engraved onto the spears and swords that they were holding, only magic to the degree of shooting basic flame arrows repetitively could be used. If gathered in a moderate number, they might produce a fixed war results in the battlefield, but using them in the current situation was akin to pouring oil on the fire. It was also because Dimitar had judged that they wouldn’t be able to utilise their precious armaments sufficiently if it was here, that he had thought of entering the mansion and fight.

「—Don’t interfere—prioritise carrying out the casualties and extinguishing the fire! Leave it to me to be this kid’s opponent!」

Salomon, who had brushed off the sparks and re-gripped the gigantic axe, stared at Dimitar and gradually shortened the distance between them. It was according to Dimitar’s plan that the coming and going of the second floor and mansion’s interior was prevented by the fire, but from another point of view, it could also be said that the space to move around was reduced due to it. For Salomon whose blows had weight to them despite his slow movement, restricting Dimitar’s fine movements should work advantageously for him.

Salomon also had the confidence that he absolutely wouldn’t lose to Dimitar if it was a one-on-one.

「You seem pretty composed, then please answer a question of mine」

Rotating his neck lightly, Dimitar spoke.

「—Do you not have a relative or something in Seriba?」

「Seriba? Which countryside is that?」

「A plump middle-aged man (*Don Puyol, Seriba's mayor*)...iya, it's a trivial story. Please forget it」

「Foolish...is it a practical joke?!」

The gigantic axe descended head-on. Dimitar withdrew right behind, made an opening and immediately tried to step towards Salomon's chest, but with an instantaneous judgement, he changed the leap that he was about to do previously to a big side step.

「...Fumu」

Salomon's axe, which was swung down and appeared to be sinking into the floor, stopped exactly just before that, changed its vector suddenly and came up just like a spear. If Dimitar had tried to close the distance with Salomon, he might have received the current raising stab in the front.

「A kid with a good intuition...I've a high opinion of you now...」

Salomon, who had shown that he stepped strongly to break the floor tiles into pieces, momentarily looked at Dimitar who had jumped horizontally and smiled thinly.

「—However! Can you endure beyond this point with your intuition only!?!」

「!」

Salomon who had wrapped his whole body in metal armour trod with a speed exceeding Dimitar's expectation. He attacked Dimitar where just a moment of delayed reaction would become a fatal chance. When Dimitar put strength into his abs in preparation for the

shock, his body had already floated lightly off the floor by about ten centimetres and blown off backwards.

「Ku...!」

When Salomon had already closed the gap even more, he greatly brandished the battle axe horizontally. If Dimitar stepped in while receiving that blow which drew a straight line, his body would simply become round slices.

Dimitar grasped Jagieruka that he had recovered in a backhand grip with both hands and stabbed it into the floor.

There, the massive axe's blade flew. Jagieruka's blade clashed against Salomon's axe, and sparks scattered.

When he stopped the blow of the axe, Dimitar pushed his right hand against Salomon's chest at once.

「Gua—a!?!」

Salomon, who had retreated greatly, held down his chest from above the armour and anguished. Although just for an instant, the flame created by Dimitar had scorched Salomon's armour, and its heat burnt his skin.

「...When fighting against a magic warrior, one mustn't carelessly wear things like metal armour...seems like you guys don't have such know-how too」

Dimitar pulled out Jagieruka and laughed.

The movement of Salomon from just now was obviously accelerated by some sort of magic. It was likely that a magic crest for that purpose was fitted onto Salomon's armour. It seemed that he was using an armament which was one rank above his subordinate soldiers'.

However, it wasn't perfect either. If it could utilise magic of a level

like those used in the Seal Chivalric Order, Salomon's tackle would be heavier, and might have incapacitated Dimitar with one blow.

For it to have ended with that degree (*where Dimitar wasn't incapacitated in one blow*), it meant that Salomon's comprehension and proficiency regarding magic were to that extent after all. Even if the magic crest which had to be carved on the flesh originally was substituted with a tool, if the person using it wasn't skilled in magic, its real worth couldn't be demonstrated.

「...It's done this way」

Drawing a sign lightly on Jagieruka's tip, magic power passed through his magic crests. Dimitar's whole body was filled with new power and his movements accelerated.

「Kid!?!」

「...It's unfortunate, but nothing can be done with willpower only」

Dimitar closed in on Salomon who had a surprised expression and violently collided against him using his shoulder's tip, as though to repay what was done to him a while ago.

「W, what...t!?!」

「In the case of Amaddo, even the nobles' foolish sons who don't possess a fragment of policy can do a feat like this. In short, they're different from you guys based on the first starting point. Whether Dante is a patriot or whatever, this difference can't be simply filled」

In reality, there were hardly any young men who were as skilful as Dimitar in this kind of magic in the Seal Chivalric Order, but that bluff was enough to give Salomon even more shock.

「Fuu!」

Dimitar aimed a strike from a direct overhead position at Salomon whose balance was destroyed. Despite that, Salomon whose back was

on fire put up his battle axe and caught Jagieruka's blade.

However, the battle axe's handle easily became two equal parts.

「Paa—」

Jagieruka's blade ran through from the top to the bottom without change, and deeply split apart Salomon's armour.

「Oh...ah...」

「...Biranoba's weapons and armours sure are brittle, huh?」

Dimitar spoke cruelly to Salomon whose eyes were wide open and knees were shaking.

「...Not only magic, even its simple military technology can't catch up to Amaddo, so this might be expected. In the first place, such facts could be understood if you think just a little, and yet why are you convinced that you can win against me?」

「Gu, gaa—!」

Both arms of Salomon stretched towards Dimitar's neck.

「You followed the wrong master」

Dimitar evaded Salomon's arms just before his windpipe was grabbed and crushed, and thrust the tip of Jagieruka into the armour's crack.

「...If you're an ex-mercenary who can freely choose who to serve, then that's your responsibility. Don't think badly of me」

「—」

Salomon's death cry was coloured by a deep crimson flame.

「...Fun」

Dimitar kicked Salomon's chest lightly, extracted Jagieruka and snorted. Salomon whose armour's inside had torrents of flames poured into it staggered with a "nota nota", fell face-up shortly and didn't move.

「L...leader!？」

The soldiers, who had lent their shoulders to their comrades and were trying escape from this sea of fire, witnessed Salomon's final moment and let out sorrowful groans.

Dimitar returned Jagieruka to its scabbard and spoke to those soldiers.

「...There's no need for the underlings to get dragged into their superior's world and die, right?

Discard your weapons and armours and escape quickly. The military police will begin to move tomorrow. If you still stay as Dante's private soldiers, you'll be implicated and thrown into prison」

It wasn't clear whether Dimitar's consideration got through to the soldiers. He didn't plan to talk in detail beyond that, and had no intention of checking if the soldiers nodded. Dimitar stopped his breathing with a puff, executed an approach run and flew towards the wall of fire.





Karin and Petra's grandmother was from the Valiente House.

Assuming so, one might be able to say that the Valiente House was originally a family lineage that produced numerous people with magic abilities. In fact, Dante who was the heir of the Valiente House skilfully mastered the sword and shield created via engineering, and fought above equal footing against Karin.

It meant that he had magic talent by nature. If Dante had been born in Amaddo, he'd have developed his talent as an excellent magic warrior without depending on such tools; otherwise, there was no doubt that he'd establish his position in the Seal Chivalric Order.

「—If I've this Gabirondo and Begiristain, even I can overwhelm a Dominas」

Swinging the sword once, Dante spoke triumphantly. For each of them (*Dante's actions*) to be unnaturally theatrical, it might have been a habit from childhood. Specifically, Karin didn't dislike it, but she was amazed a lot.

「.....」

Karin brushed the hem of her dress lightly and stood up.

So far, all of the magic that Karin had unleashed was offset by the shock wave created from the shield that Dante was holding. On the contrary, Karin had been receiving minor wounds here and there.

「...You ought to understand by now. You cannot win against me」

Karin slowly shook her head at those words of Dante.

「You still don't understand. You cannot win against a Dominas」

「Yare yare...how far do I've to go for you to admit your defeat?」

「As long as there's faith towards Redountra, a Dominas will not be

defeated」

「I should give praise to that faith, but—」

Dante suddenly faltered and frowned.

「...Was the mansion set on fire?」

A burning smell drifted from somewhere. Perhaps Valeria had done it flashily.

Dante spat out in displeasure.

「Doing an unnecessary thing...it seems like the explanation towards His Majesty will become even more troublesome again」

「That's to say...as expected, this time's matter is all your own judgement? The government and army don't know anything...」

「If they were more capable, I could have rely on them a little more but—」

「That arrogance will destroy you」

Karin put up her left hand overhead and swung once. “Tornado” dashed through the empty space and severed the chains that suspended the chandelier.

「!」

Dante held the shield over his head while jumping sideways to avoid it. The candles' flames spread onto the carpet near Dante who had escaped from being crushed to death.

Karin raised a strong wind and fiercely stirred it up even more.

「Though you should also have memories of this place—it's regrettable」

When he brandished Gabirondo while jumping back, the cold air

which was mixed with the small ice grains (*from Karin's previous attacks*) spread like ripples to creep on the floor.

「!」

The flames that collided with the cold air changed into hot steam, and coloured the hall white. When Karin instinctively faced away and retreated, an ice arrow penetrated the white veil and flew towards her bosom.

「Karin!」

「—Valeria!?!」

Karin, whose arm was suddenly pulled and fell over on that spot, quickly changed her line of sight.

Valeria, who was directly besides her and was bleeding from her shoulder's tip, sank down to the floor. Although Karin didn't understand what happened well, she was only certain that Valeria had protected her and suffered a wound.

「Good grief, even though you acted shrewdly on one thing or another, in the end, your finish is naive, isn't it? ...That's because you lack experience」

Valeria endured the pain and smiled bitterly. Karin reflexively counterattacked with an indifferent mutter.

「To be able to say it so proudly, you're also inexperienced, aren't you?」

「...Why didn't you say "I'm sorry" at such times?」

「.....」

She could do it as much as she liked if it was an insubstantial apology. To apologise voluntarily, behave modestly and avoid discord with others were Karin's secrets of success in life. In fact, even if she

believed that she wasn't in the wrong, she'd apologise first. Her pride wasn't hurt since it was just a superficial apology, and if she could avoid trouble by just bowing her head, then it was a cheap thing.

On the contrary, words of apology didn't come out when she really believed that she was at fault. Karin wasn't used to saying such heavy words.

「...Ma, it's fine though. At any rate, I wasn't demanding an apology from you since the beginning!」

Valeria, who had applied strength and stood up, held down her left shoulder and shut up.

Karin looked at Valeria with a sidelong glance and checked the damage on her friend. Numerous small wounds ran from Valeria's left shoulder to her upper arm. They weren't serious physical damage, but it couldn't be helped but to say that her war potential was greatly lowered. Although they were just trifling wounds, if they harmed her magic crests, she wouldn't be able to use her magic smoothly like usual.

And that very same thing could be said to Karin.

Is this called actual combat? —Karin quietly arranged her breathing and coldly focused on the status quo where she presumably couldn't rely fully on her strength.

The magic crests which were engraved onto the frail skin must be exposed to use magic freely, but if that skin was wounded, then magic couldn't be used. Karin now realised the madness where Dominas, who were called magic warriors and carried such dilemma, had to square off against enemies at this distance.

But in contrast, she didn't think of wanting to escape from here. Nonetheless, Valeria who should have experienced the rigorousness of an actual combat more than Karin by a step, stood up without losing her smile.

Hence, it was impossible for only Karin to abandon this fight. Not to mention, the one before their eyes was Karin's childhood friend.

「...If I don't accompany him until the end, who will?」

「You said something, Karin?」

「...Nothing」

Karin sighed slightly and when she wiped the blood on both arms with the shawl wrapped around her waist, she held Valeria back and made her withdraw.

「Karin?」

「You treat your own injuries. —I'll handle Dante」

「Just a min...!」

「I thought that he'd notice my miss eventually if I went along with him...but he didn't notice it after all」

「Your miss? What are you saying?」

Dante narrowed his eyes quizzically.

「It'd be great if you look at reality, Karin. In reality, the injured one is you—all of you only. I don't have a single scratch」

「Indeed. ...However, the cause of that is my naivety. The wounds that Valeria and I bear were all due to my naivety; it wasn't because you're strong. Not to mention, it's absolutely impossible for you to be stronger than a Dominas」

She looked at Valeria fleetingly. Karin didn't have any more words for her in particular, but perhaps Valeria had discerned something with just that, she nodded slightly and withdrew slowly to the rear.

「It's a very simple story if you think about it, and you didn't notice it」

Arranging her breathing, Karin gathered her consciousness in both hands. A bluish-white light ran from her cleavage via her shoulder towards the tip of her white arm. As a result of her magic crests being damaged here and there, it took more time than usual, but Karin who was called a Dominas didn't falter.

「I won't let you!」

Swinging Gabirondo, Dante seized the initiative and shot flame arrows.

「...Indeed, very simple」

A scorching heat and cold air dwelt in Karin's right and left hands respectively. It was an impossible feat for many magic warriors to manipulate several magic crests simultaneously. Karin who had pulled it off very easily released two magic arrows at almost the same time.

「...Even if you're somehow able to have magic crests on borrowed items, the one to use them in the end is you」

Both flame arrows clashed from directly opposite and disappeared, but Karin's ice arrow flew towards Dante without change.

「Chi...!」

The shield which Dante held up negated the ice arrow with a unique explosive sound that shook the air.

However, Karin didn't stop both her arms during that time. Her left and right hands were immediately loaded with new ice arrows again, and she literally released them towards Dante in rapid-succession.

「...!」

While stopping the innumerable magic arrows that flew here at high speed one after another, sweat began to ooze slightly on Dante's forehead.

「Well? Have you realised as expected?」

Together with those cold words, the nth ice arrows that Karin had thrown hit Dante's shield directly without being offset.

「—Gu」

The valiant young Prime Minister who had thrown off his dark red vestment staggered greatly from that impact. Moreover, there were two ice arrows.

「...Ku, oh!」

The first shot was made to disappear by the shock wave, but the second shot couldn't be erased, and Dante who ended up stopping it with Begiristain staggered again and lost his balance.

In a flash, Karin exposed her thighs from the rip of her dress and greatly took a step forward. The luminescence of the bluish-white magic crest coiled around her white skin, and a cold air, which couldn't be compared to so far, ran from her step.

「...No matter what kind of magic crest a person possesses, magic can't be fired in rapid succession so often, Dante」

The cold air ran in a straight line and materialised in the form of an ice fang. Just like the fang of a wild beast, the icicle extended upwards diagonally from the floor and attacked Dante with an unavoidable timing.

「!? Gua—」

Perhaps the reflexes of Dante who had immediately protected himself with the shield ought to be praised, but that was all. Unable to offset it with Begiristain's shock wave, Dante received the gigantic icicle's direct hit head-on and was flashily sent flying.

「...Even if it's just a little, if you've accumulated proper training, you'd have understood at once」

Brushing her pale hair lightly, Karin stepped up to Dante who had sunk down to the floor in a posture of being flung against the wall.

「It's hard even for proficient magic warriors to gather and use magic many times in a short time, much less people like you who didn't train for that. ...Well? It's like you just ran a long distance at full speed, right?」

「.....」

Dante's shoulders heaved greatly, but he couldn't utter any words and glared at Karin fixedly.

「It's reckless to exchange shots with a Dominas by equipping a magic-tempered blade, Dante. We keep on enduring the pain and suffering which ordinary people cannot imagine since childhood, and obtain our current powers. ...They can't be surpassed with such tools」

It was simply because Karin couldn't become callous that Dante was able to overwhelm her until the middle (*of the fight*). If it was the intelligent Dante, he'd have naturally notice his own fatigue while using magic many times. She thought that if it was Dante, even if he was competing with a Dominas from the front, he'd have realised that the first to be short of breath would be himself who had no stamina magic-wise. She thought that he'd realise that he could never win, admitted his loss and discarded his weapons.

But before he was a clear young man, Dante was an arrogant youth (*his arrogance precedes his logic*). That arrogance clouded his eyes and he couldn't notice this fact.

Therefore, she had to knock him down until this point.

「...Dominas are that special at least. I'm sorry, Dante」

Looking at Dante who used his sword as a support and tried to stand up, Karin held both her hands out.

「That's why, I...! Our country too, a Dominas—!」

「In comparison, you underestimated a Dominas too much. Or did you mistake me because I had always followed behind you? I'm no longer the same as that time」

「Karin—!」

Dante raised Gabirondo overhead with a very hoarse shout.

「...This's the end already. If I don't finish everything soon and extinguish the fire, your memories and mine will really become ashes」

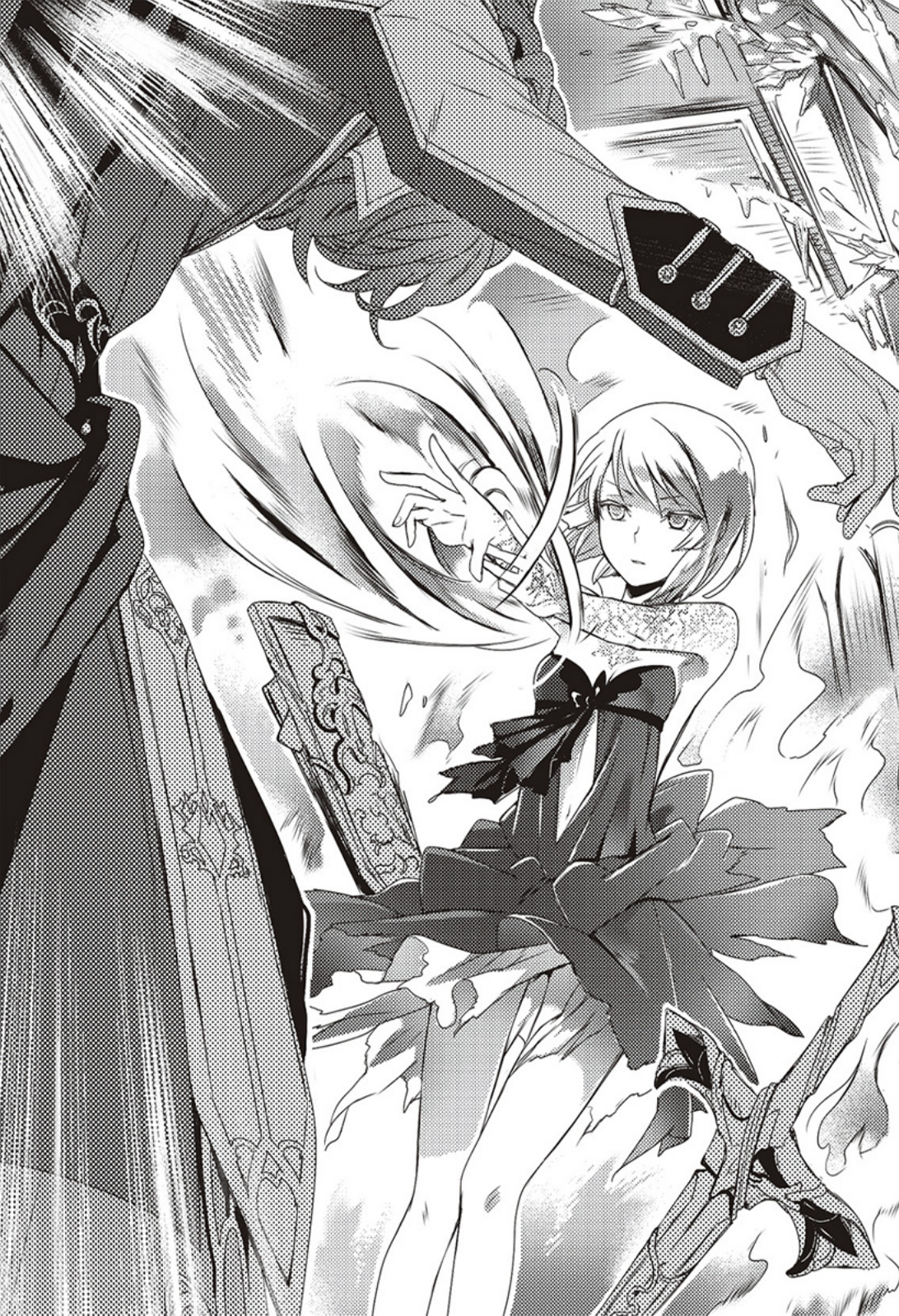
The last two arrows released by Karin sent the sword and shield flying from Dante's hands, and his body struck the wall again due to that impact.

「.....」

Dante collapsed face down and didn't move as it was. However, he wasn't dead. He might have a bruise or so at his back when he crashed into the wall, but excluding that, he was probably mostly unhurt.

Dante was just severely exhausted. Although Karin was induced into a similar state, her appearance was almost close to ruins.

Valeria who had retrieved Dante's sword and shield stroked Karin's cheek suddenly.



「...?」

「There's blood on it」

Wiping off the blood scattered on Karin's cheek, Valeria smiled.

「...This's trivial, but as expected, aren't you hungry?」

「I don't really care」

「Is that so? I actually think that it's a comparatively important matter though」

For Valeria to not try to speak words of cheap comfort to Karin, who had defeated Dante with her own hands and destroyed his ambition, might be Valeria's own way of taking her feelings into consideration. Setting aside whether that turned out well or not, Valeria was a child who put great effort into taking people's feelings into consideration.

Karin sighed for a long while.

「...If I return to the country, I can't visit Obaa-sama's grave」

「Why?」

「Obaa-sama also had memories of this place」

Surveying the ruined hall that was a mere shadow of its former self, Karin sighed again.

Epilogue - Try and Pretend That Everything Didn't Happen

The leading country of the “**Holy Alliance**”, Amaddo, held the position of the continent’s foremost powerful nation since its founding until now.

The majority of its territory was open fields that were suitable for agriculture, thus a stable production of food was possible, and its population increased steadily. Moreover, with the economic growth that followed, the government actively advanced its military expansion, and that could be said to build up the current Amaddo.

However, if one was to shift his focus onto the recent years, it could be said that the firm foreign policy of the royal family that view national power as a backing accelerated it (*Amaddo’s growth*).

As the previous tenth generation Jeffren was a schemer, and due to the eleventh generation Jeffren’s battles, a lot of territories were acquired from the neighbouring countries.



Thereupon, considering the leaders of the various countries, what kind of king would the next twelfth generation Jeffren become?

One night had passed, and although tragic scars remained here and there on Dante’s mansion, the fire was already extinguished, and long straight columns of smokes weren’t rising up anymore.

Although for this mansion to regain its former appearance, a considerable number of years and months were needed. First, the corpses of the soldiers who died in last night’s battle had to be retrieved, and then a thorough investigation would be carried out

under the direction of the Amaddo's army. Even if repairs began afterwards, in the situation where Dante who should be the mansion's master was arrested, they were sure to advance slowly.

「...And finally, Biranoba's government will manage this place」

Perhaps Lucius's words which had come out from the middle of his conversation with Dimitar were directed towards Karin who was gazing fixedly at the mansion.

On the other hand, Dimitar averted his eyes from the Seal Chivalric Order's members who were going in and out of the mansion and wrinkled up his brow. Could his somewhat uninterested expression be somehow related to his past where he was dismissed from the Chivalric Order?

Shaking her head lightly, Valeria spoke to Lucius.

「Nevertheless, Biranoba readily accepted Amaddo army's intervention, huh?」

「It isn't intervention, but *cooperation* since there isn't an organisation which specialised in magic within Biranoba. ...Its Prime Minister-kakka judged that our country's cooperation is indispensable in order to investigate what Dante Valiente was trying to do」

「Still, to have decided that far right after yesterday—」

「It's all due to the work of His Highness」

The Crown Prince had probably led the Chivalric Order, entered Biranoba's royal palace informally, and with the Prime Minister as the other party, pushed through a demand—which was called a negotiation—interlaced with firmness. Previously, Valeria had thought the Crown Prince of her country as a hobbyist who was only occupied with playing around with roses, but following Seriba, he had now accomplished a difficult mission even in this Buruan. She understood that the Crown Prince wasn't simply a good-natured youth.

Dimitar looked at his childhood friend with upturned eyes while playing around with the magic shield called Begiristain which was deformed here and there.

「And? Is His Highness still in the midst of a meeting with Prime Minister-kakka?」

「Yes. They're having lunch together in private. In addition, they've to work out the details on various things, so his return may be a bit later」

「Eh? Then Lucius-sama too—?」

「Hai. I may have to remain here a little while more」

「No way—」

Although Valeria had thought that she could be rocked without a care (*by the carriage's movements*) in the carriage with Lucius during their return, that dream was quickly crushed, and she unconsciously raised a miserable voice.

Looking backing at Bettina who was quietly transporting their luggage to the carriage by herself, Valeria asked weakly.

「That means the people going back are these five too...?」

「Dii will guard everyone closely until you return to Roma」

「I don't need a guard though...」

「Don't say it selfishly. Learn from Rudbeck-geika's example」

At Dimitar's words that were thrown towards her in a whisper, Valeria looked at Karin.

Although it was the usual taciturn Karin, she talked less today. Surely she was thinking about Dante.

Lucius quietly exchanged looks at Valeria and party, and

deliberately lowered his voice.

「As expected, this matter has to await His Highness's return and depend on his decision...but it seems that the case this time will be dealt with secretly without going public by either us or Biranoba」

「...What's it specifically?」

「In short, it means that the incident of Dante scheming this and that won't be left behind in formal records, and to pretend that it didn't happen from the beginning, I guess」

「Ha!? Isn't...that unfair? They concealed our country's military secrets, right? And yet it was decided that such a thing didn't happen?」

「I understand that Valeria-jou who actually bore the full brunt is angry...but please endure here. Our country doesn't want to stimulate Biranoba's national sentiment any more than this」

When Lucius said so apologetically, thus making Valeria's cheeks twitched, Dimitar lightly sank his knee into her bottom.

「De!？」

「Don't worry about it, Lucius. ...I'll explain it properly to our ignorant Eminence-sama afterwards」

「Hey...it hurts! You're really rude! Karin and I'd have died if we were careless, you know!? Even you were the same, right!？」

「You're noisy. ...Since Rudbeck-geika consents to it, you should also show tolerance of that extent」

「Huh? Karin's fine with that?」

「...I'm sorry, Valeria. I also think it's the best to do so」

While brushing both arms which had magic crests that were damaged from wounds and burns, Karin revealed an indifferent smile

slightly.

「Remember this well, Your Eminence. Why did Dante originally thought of things like this time?」

「That's...because of the current status where Biranoba is like a vassal state of Amaddo」

「To sum it up, it's like this. It's easy to make Biranoba openly get the short end of the stick with this matter, but it won't be amusing if a second or third Dante pretending to be a patriot appear because of that. It's also troublesome if it turned to the point where they treat Dante like a hero who stood up in a national crisis」

「Therefore, it's better to not especially demand for reparations and cession of territory from Biranoba in this situation. Though Dante Valiente is officially recuperating from burns and has left this mansion, he'll be imprisoned under Amaddo army's surveillance」

「...Thank you, Lucius-sama」

Karin and Petra quietly bowed their heads.

It should be simple to somehow provide a reason and kill the arrested Dante. Even from Biranoba's viewpoint, it must be easy to make Dante alone bear the responsibility and resign. However, to not have done so was because there were too many young nobles who idolised Dante, thus they wanted to prevent further burst of outrage; above all else, Dante was Karin's relative.

「No, you don't have to extend your gratitude. His Highness intends to learn of the truth accurately」

「That's to say...?」

「These armaments and research materials, which are discovered from this mansion and the detached residence, are deemed to be somehow related to Nereida. All of them are to be unconditionally recovered by our army, though Biranoba displayed considerable

disapproval」

「That's nice, the Chief Engineer will be overjoyed」

「...Seeing that Nereida's whereabouts isn't known, it's just a matter of time that the magic engineering technology will be leaked to various countries hereafter. If that leak isn't stopped, then our country must always continue to maintain a technology that is better than other countries. This time's spoils of war should be helpful for that」

Lucius informed Dimitar who was playing with the shield to deliver it properly and went back to supervising his group members.

「—Everyone! I've finished loading the luggage!」

At the voice of Bettina, Valeria and party turned around.

「...Let's return. I'm tired」

Karin stifled a yawn and headed for the carriage.

「Karin~, may I sit in the front~?」

Petra said such a thing in a dragging tone.

「...I don't mind if Richternach-kyou is fine with it...but why?」

「I mean~, you're shocked by something, right? If I'm together with such a you inside the compartment, then I can't talk too and even I'll feel depressed, won't I~?」

Uttering words that rubbed Karin's nerves the wrong way while smiling, Petra promptly went up to the coachman pedestal.

「Bettina-cha~n, let's continue our talk from last night~」

「Hai ha~i」

It was unknown what happened while the two escaped by

themselves last night, but some friendship or feeling of solidarity might have been born between these people who pointlessly stretched the end of a word.

Was she used to her cousin's soft abuse? Karin just smiled bitterly and without saying anything, boarded the carriage while rubbing her eyes sleepily.

「...Certainly, it may be a little hard for Petra」

Valeria, who had boarded the carriage after Karin, noticed Dimitar entering calmly from behind her and was startled.

「Just a min...eh? Why?」

「Are you an idiot? Since the coachman pedestal is occupied, I can only sit here, right? That's enough so move in」

Dimitar pushed Valeria inside and shut the door.

「Haiyo~! 」

The strike of the bridles made a “pishiri” sound, and the carriage began to move with a “koto koto”.

「.....」

When the carriage began to move, Karin had already closed her eyes. Maybe he was also exhausted from last night's fierce fighting; Dimitar folded his arms arrogantly, crammed himself onto the seat and shut his eyes firmly.

—Just when she thought so, Dimitar suddenly spoke while keeping his eyes shut.

「Oi」

「...What?」

「It's irritating to hear you repeat it every time」

「Ha? What's this about?」

「You don't have to speak formally in particular. You can address me without honorific」

「Eh? Ah...what, it's about that?」

Honestly speaking, she was slightly opposed to calling Dimitar “Richternach-kyou”. For Valeria, the designation of “Richternach-kyou” normally referred to Lucius. Due to that, aside from the usual times, she'd almost unconsciously addressed him as 「Dimitar!」 without honorific on the spur of moment, but what Dimitar was saying was that if she was to mumble at that point, then she should just address him without honorific from the beginning.

Resting her chin in her hand on the window frame, Valeria spoke sarcastically to the best of her ability.

「...Maa, in the first place, you call me “you (おまえ)”, and my position is actually higher; but if you're saying it no matter what, then I may grant you the favour of doing so」

「Is that so? You don't have to do so if you don't want to. You're unusually reserved」

「Just a min...I'm not being reserved particularly!」

「Fun」

When Dimitar raised his lips and laughed slightly, he cut off there and shut his mouth.

「.....」

Passing through a street lined with cytissus scoparius, the white silhouette of Buruan came into view. It was bathed in the midday sunlight, and looked as if it was shining in silver.

However, maybe because she had stayed up all night, it was shining

too dazzlingly for the present Valeria. Closing the window's curtain, Valeria also decided to sleep.

「...Dimitar?」

She lowered her voice and muttered softly while examining the state of affairs, but there was no response.

A dazzling light shone in from the gap of the curtain suddenly, and illuminated the youth's profile.

「—」

Perhaps he hated that, when Dimitar furrowed his brow and turned his face away, Valeria noticed something like a bruise on his nape.

Seeing the bruise that resembled a person's hand-print, for some reason, Valeria reflexively shut her eyes.

あとがき

こんにちは。ミキリです。

今回はさらにいろんな登場人物が
描けました。

と「わけ」の絵・挿絵に力を入れた
マリシェちゃんを描きました。

おんな幼女に服を洗濯させるなんて、
どういふことですか、マダムさん！

それは、
次巻でも会いましょう
幸いです！

2022.5
ミキリ#16/3

Credits

Translation [[Luminstia](#)]

eBook [[Olivki](#)]